JANUARY 15 CENTS

Adventure

A big four-part story of Africa by ARTHUR A. NELSON begins in this number—

"THE ADVENTURERS"

OIL AT SAN NICOLAS (*Complete Novelette*) . . W. TOWNEND
DISOWNED (*A Dick Anthony Story*) . . . . TALBOT MUNDY
THE RETURN OF WOLF McINNIS . . . ARTHUR H. MORSE
A COME-ON CHARLEY STORY . . . . THOMAS ADDISON
JERRY ROHAN'S GOAT (*Baseball*) . . OCTAVUS R. COHEN
THE NEXT TO THE LAST SHOT . CAPT. GEORGE B. RODNEY
AND OTHERS

THE UNIV OF TEX THE LIBRARY

Digitized by Google

You remember "*Kutle of the Desert,*" by Honoré Willsie?

Mrs. Willsie has gone *Kutle* one better with her fascinating new novel,

"Still Jim,"

beginning in the December EVERYBODY'S MAGAZINE.

"*Still Jim*" is an intensely interesting story of a young New England engineer, descended from the sturdy old Plymouth Rock stock, who finds himself and his kind crowded out of their old homes.

Jim goes West, building dams in spite of natural obstacles and political graft. Through his hardships and experiences he not only finds himself, but also finds the reasons *why the Anglo-Saxon has failed in America.*

Penelope Dennis, as joyous an Irish heroine as ever walked, helps *Jim* every inch of the way.

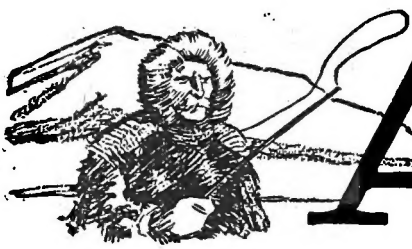
Mrs. Willsie's story gives a startling answer to a very important question, and in addition is an absorbing romance filled to the brim with action.

BEGIN IT IN

Everybody's Magazine

for December

Digitized by Google



Adventure

Vol. 9—No. 3.

Published by THE RIDGWAY COMPANY
ERMAN J. RIDGWAY, President — RAY BROWN, Secretary and Treasurer
Spring and Macdougal Sts. - - - New York City
6, Henrietta St., Covent Garden, London, W. C., England

Entered at the New York Post-Office as Second-Class Matter

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, Managing Editor

Contents for January 1915

Cover Design . . . . . ***H. George Brandt***

Oil At San Nicolas ***A Complete Novelette*** . . . . . **W. Townend** 3
You have read enough of W. Townend's stories to be particularly interested in his first long novelette, and your interest will certainly not be disappointed by this strong story of the West.

The Return of Wolf McInnis . . . . . **Arthur H. Morse** 41
A story of Alaska and of the strong men it breeds. And the strong women.

"For Tricks That Are Vain" . . . . . **Norman Springer** 47
If you read "For Ways that are Dark" last month, you'll surely read this. If you didn't, it's a story entirely complete in itself—and a good one.

The Adventurers ***A Four-Part Story I.*** . . . . . **Arthur A. Nelson** 53
When a business man in a responsible position writes his first story—a book-length novel at that—in spare time, the odds are that you can afford not to read it. Here is a startling exception. If you like Rider Haggard at his best, read this story. A tale of the mysterious interior of Africa that fairly spells "adventure."

Who Won? . . . . . **William West** 91
The story of an automobile race and a bitter rivalry that end in one great, dramatic moment.

The Saving of the *Cora Andrews* ***A Narrative Poem*** . . . **Lewis R. Freeman** 100
A true story of a heroic deed.

The Next to the Last Shot . . . . . **Captain George Brydges Rodney** 102
A Western tale with a snapper at the end.

Disowned! An Adventure of Dick Anthony of Arran
A Complete Novelette . **Talbot Mundy** 107
Dick Anthony has already become a name to conjure with—the adventurer of adventurers, a man who *is* a man. In this story his adventures grow to such size that they assume international importance. There are times when his own life hangs by a hair, but there are no times when his fiery courage and his cool mastery of the thousands who follow him fail him in the pinch.

Jerry Rohan's Goat . . . . . **Octavus Roy Cohen** . . . 143
A good baseball story that introduces an entirely new stunt in baseball tales—a simple little stunt that helps a lot and that is likely to go into general use.

Northman's Song ***Poem*** . . . . . **Richard Butler Glaenzer** . . 148

(Continued on next page)

Digitized by Google

(Continued from preceding page)

Come-On Charley's Merry Christmas . . . . . **Thomas Addison** . . . 149

As predicted when these stories began, *Come-On Charley* has already been invited to appear both in book form and on the stage. Seldom has a fiction character so quickly found favor with the reading public. His adventure this month is one of the best yet.

Sea-Fever *Poem* . . . . . **Mary Carolyne Davies** . . 163

A Man With Nine Lives *A Two-Part Story Il.* . . . . **Richard Marsh** 164

If you've read the first half of this story, you'll read this second half. If you haven't read the first half, the brief synopsis will give you the plot, and you can go ahead anyway.

The Camp-Fire **A Meeting-Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers.** 217

Your Chance to Help Edit "Adventure" 220

Headings . . . . . ***F. J. Casavant***

WAITING FOR YOU!

WHAT *ADVENTURE* FOR FEBRUARY HAS FOR YOU NEXT MONTH

"NO NAME" . . . . . **Talbot Mundy**

A Complete Dick Anthony Novelette

This strong story begins Dick Anthony's final adventure in Persia. And what he does in this story is worth reading about.

The Admiral of the Line . . **Stephen Chalmers**

A Book-Length Novel

A Tale of the old days when England and America were enemies instead of friends.

The Dance at Aleck Fontaine's . . **Henry Oyen**

A Story of the North, by the author of "The Snow-Burner."

The Eagle Mates . . . . . **Robert V. Carr**

A Western tale of bandits and cowboys.

The In-Curve . . . . . **Octavus Roy Cohen**

A baseball yarn, with *Adventure's* new invention for baseball yarns.

The Smoke Cure . . . . . **Carrington Boykin**

An adventure among the firemen.

Come-On Charley Invests . . . **Thomas Addison**

And comes in for a little real excitement.

Spangles and Soapsuds . . . . **C. Hilton-Turvey**

A *Miss Dem.* story, and one of the best.

The Homecoming of Oklahoma Pete . **W.Townend**

A rugged tale of the Mexican border.

AND OTHERS! AND OTHERS! AND OTHERS!

Statement of the ownership, management, etc., required by the Act of August 24, 1912, of *Adventure*, published monthly at New York, N. Y., for Oct. 1, 1914. Editor, ERMAN J. RIDGWAY, 223 Spring Street, New York. Managing Editor, ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, 223 Spring Street, New York. Business Manager, JAMES F. BIRMINGHAM, 223 Spring Street, New York. Publisher, THE RIDGWAY COMPANY, a corporation, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York City. *Owners:* (If a corporation, give its name and the names and addresses of stockholders holding 1 per cent. or more of total amount of stock. If not a corporation, give names and addresses of individual owners.) *Owner:* THE RIDGWAY COMPANY, a corporation, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York City. *Stockholders:* THE FEDERAL PUBLISHING COMPANY, a corporation, 15 Exchange Place, Jersey City, N. J. THE BUTTERICK COMPANY, a corporation, 223 Spring Street, New York, N. Y. THE BUTTERICK PUBLISHING COMPANY, a corporation, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. J. F. BIRMINGHAM, Butterick Building, New York City, N. Y. WM. H. BLACK, 152 West 91st St., New York City, N. Y. EMILY JOSEPHINE DONNER, 23 Euclid Ave., Summit, N. J. W. H. GELSHENEN, 100 William St., New York City, N. Y. CLARA E. KEHOE, 2344 University Ave., New York City, N. Y. H. F. MORSE, 3 West 46th St., New York City, N. Y. LAURA J. O'LOUGHLIN, 156 Ridge St., Glens Falls, N. Y. MRS. ARETHUSA POND, 955 West End Ave., New York City, N. Y. SAMUEL REDFERN, 233 Broadway, New York City, N. Y. ERMAN J. RIDGWAY, Butterick Building, New York City, N. Y. AUGUSTUS VAN WYCK, 149 Broadway, New York City, N. Y. R. A. VAN WYCK, 149 Broadway, New York City, N. Y. G. W. WILDER, Butterick Building, New York City, N. Y. MARIE A. WILDER, Butterick Building, New York City, N. Y. BEN P. WILDER, Butterick Building, New York City, N. Y. *Known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders, holding 1 per cent. or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities:* (*If there are none, so state.*) GEORGE W. WILDER, 329 W. 108th St., New York, N. Y. GERTRUDE C. WILDER, 329 W. 108th St., New York, N. Y. JULIA MARLOWE, Hotel Walton, Philadelphia, Pa. THE FEDERAL PUBLISHING COMPANY, 15 Exchange Place, Jersey City, N. J. JOHN ADAMS THAYER, 101 E. 80th St., New York, N. Y. JOHN O'HARA COSGRAVE, 128 W. 59th St., New York, N. Y. J. F. BIRMINGHAM, Business Manager. *Sworn to and subscribed before me this 29th day of September*, 1914. JAMES B. SHEEHAN, Notary Public. (*My commission expires March* 30, 1916.) [Seal.]

Issued monthly. Yearly Subscription, $1.50 in advance. Single copy, fifteen cents.

Foreign postage, $1.00 additional. Canadian postage, 30 cents.

Trade-Mark Registered: Copyright, 1914, by The Ridgway Company in the United States and Great Britain.

The editor assumes no risk for manuscripts and illustrations submitted to this magazine, but he will use all due care while they are in his hands.

Digitized by Google

Adventure

Registered in the U. S. Patent Office

Jan 1915
Vol. 9
No. 3

Oil at San Nicolas

by W. Townend.

CHAPTER I

THE PREJUDICES OF OLD MAN MORRISON

MONEY is not the only thing in life worth having. And yet, with money, are not most of the other things possible?

Dan Cleghorn, riding slowly through the sunlight and dust of an April morning, pondered. The day was warm, the air sweet with the scent of flowers and sage brush, the sky deep blue and flecked with clouds of dazzling white, the grass still green from the Spring rains, but Dan Cleghorn's thoughts were dark as Winter and bitter as the taste of the water from the well at Silver's, the other side of the hills.

Already he felt himself an outcast, shunned by all, even by those who had no cause. That he himself was ruined would not lessen their hatred, he knew.

Sometimes in moods of self-examination Dan had wondered why it was he differed from other men and wherein that difference lay. Friendship, the easy, whole-hearted friendship of the Southwest, was beyond his power. Nor in the past had he ever sought it. But now, threatened by disaster, his loneliness hurt.

Was there no one to whom he might turn for pity and advice? He chewed nervously at the lash of his quirt. His wife? His lips twitched in a curious smile. There was his wife, of course. But what help was she? None at all. However much he might love her—and he did love her dearly—he was not blind to her limitations.

And then he remembered Bradley Armstrong and, in a measure, the burden of his woes was lifted. Bradley would understand and sympathize. Bradley would do everything that one man could do to help another. A friend like Bradley was worth having. And thinking of Bradley Armstrong and all that he stood for, Dan Cleghorn knew that even for himself life had its compensations.

Copyright 1914 by The Ridgway Company. All rights reserved.

Digitized by Google

AT A sudden bend in the road there came into sight a man driving a white horse. Something in the set of the man's huge shoulders and the shambling gait of the horse brought a frown to Dan's forehead. He reined in his pony and waited, dreading the encounter, and yet snatching desperately at it as a gambler staking his all on the turn of a card.

The man in the buckboard, big and burly and clumsily built, with an ill-kept, flowing, gray beard, stained with tobacco-juice, a big eagle's nose and small, yellow eyes, laughed as he drew near.

The frown on Dan's forehead deepened.

"How do, Mr. Morrison!" he said. "How are you?"

"Fine, Dan. Fine! An' yourself. Purty brash, hey?"

He grinned and looked cynically at Dan from beneath his heavy eyebrows.

"Great weather we're havin', Mr. Morrison, ain't we?" said Dan.

"An' I don't mind bettin' a hundred dollars it ain't weather he wants to talk about, neither." The old man clasped his hands about his crossed knees and leaned forward. "Dan Cleghorn," he snapped, "you're a fool! What is it?"

"Why, Mr. Morrison . . . why, nothin'—" Dan wiped his mouth with the back of his hand—"I guess—guess I'll be ridin' on. Got to see after some cattle over at Silver's."

"Listen a minute an' don't be in sich a dolgarned hurry! Dan, I been meanin' to chin with yuh this past month but I ain't had the chance till now. I ain't blind, Dan, nor deef. An' I ain't like to forget that yer dad was my pardner. An' a good pardner, too.

"I ain't insultin' yuh, Dan, am I, when I say thar was more savvy in yer dad's little finger than you have in yer whole carcass. He'd 'uv been everlastin' disappointed in his son these days, an' that's a fack. A better man than you are, Dan, or ever will be, an' don't yuh forget it — never! He wouldn't 'uv been fool enough to have taken up with a four-flusher like Bradley Armstrong, anyways. Would he, Dan? No, don't run off yet-a-while. I want to talk to yuh. It's a pleasure I don't often git."

"Well," said Dan sulkily. "What's wrong with Bradley? He's a friend uh mine, an' I ain't goin' to set here an' hear you sayin' things about him what ain't true. There's nothin' wrong with Bradley, Mr. Morrison, an' yuh know it."

"Know it! I know he's a crook, son. An' you'll know it, too, purty soon. Think I don't hear what's goin' on in San Nicolas! What folks are sayin' about you! An' what's really been happenin' this past nine or ten months! Are yuh mad or what? An' you the son of Tom Cleghorn! That's what gits me! See here, Dan, you're clever, but you ain't near clever enough to fool *me*. Yuh won't say it now, but I know durn' well what it was yuh wanted to see me about. An' I tell yuh right now. No. That's flat, ain't it?"

THE old man removed his wide-brimmed sombrero and wiped his face with a red handkerchief.

Dan eyed him with cold anger.

"How d'yuh know what I was goin' to say, hey?"

"Know! Seen it in yer face. Yuh want me to put some money into that oil scheme uh yours, don't yuh? Well then, I won't. Not one cent! Oil? Thar's no more oil on your land than thar is on the top uh the Cuyamacas. An' this is the third borin' you tried, ain't it? You've sunk—how much—two thousand feet maybe this time, an' yuh want to go on throwin' good money after bad by sinkin' another two thousand. Well, then, yuh won't. Not if I can help it. You've heard what people are beginnin' to say, ain't yuh?"

Dan licked his dry lips.

"What?"

"I heard 'em talkin' about you an' yer oil last week. Felton an' some uh the other suckers that yuh got money from. An' the gen'ral opinion seemed to be, Dan, that thar warn't many worse crooks than you in the State uh California. Now what do yuh say to that, hey? They're hintin—that scum—they're hintin' you've been makin' a good thing out uh yer well. What they're hintin' at today they'll be sayin' out loud tomorrer. What are yuh goin' to do, Dan? Tell the truth or—or what?"

"An' what is the truth?" said Dan.

"That Bradley Armstrong to sarve his own ends persuaded yuh to go into oil, same as he persuaded yuh to go into other things. He put money into the scheme; uh course he would. He'll lose it, hey? Uh course he will. Same as you're doin'. Only he

Digitized by Google

took durn' good care to make a hundred times over what he'll lose.

"He's playin' you fer a sucker, Dan. An' why? That's what I don't see exactly, not knowin' the facts. But he is somehow. An' you, yuh poor innocent, yuh don't see it."

"I don't," said Dan dryly. "If there was any sense in what you're sayin', I'd listen. As it is——"

The other glared.

"All right, Dan, go yer own way. You would, uh course. But don't blame me when yuh find I was speakin' the truth. Don't say you wasn't warned. An' when you find out Bradley Armstrong's a crook, don't yuh come whinin' to me fer money."

"Mr. Morrison," said Dan, "Bradley Armstrong's a friend uh mine, an' I ain't goin' to hear him called a crook fer nothin'. He's as square a man as you'd find in the county an' that's all there is to it. I won't hear no more against him. Besides there is oil on the land. Heaps of oil. Only we ain't gone down far enough. I'm goin' to be ruined—you're dead right there, Mr. Morrison—just fer the want of a few thousand dollars. But I'd see myself on the rock-pile rather than ask *you* fer a nickel."

"You'd be on the rock-pile before you got it," said Mr. Morrison. "I didn't make money by hard work to pitch it away into the ground. No, sir."

"I guess there's no use in talkin' this ways, is there?" said Dan. "I'll be movin' on, Mr. Morrison."

"Well an' good, Dan. Well an' good." The old man's fingers stroked his beard. "That's all right. Listen Dan. In six months from now you'll know that I've spoken the truth. You'll have found that Bradley's a crook. You won't have a dollar left to yer name. An' you'll be comin' to me fer help, to keep you an' Eileen from starvin'. Then I'll talk business."

"You!" said Dan. "Yuh think *that!* Well then you're wrong. You ain't said a thing today that's right. You'll have to wait a helluva long time before I come to *you* fer help. Nor Eileen, neither."

"Huh!" Mr. Morrison's face was a dark red. "I wouldn't help you Dan Cleghorn if you were starvin'. I wouldn't give you so much as a crust uh dry bread." He shook a big fist in Dan's face. "Call me a liar, hey? You young pup! If I was twenty years younger you'd know better, wouldn't yuh? Talkin' like that! Starve an' be damned! An' God help yer wife, havin' a husband like you! I'm through with you, an' glad of it."

"That's all right, then," said Dan thrusting out his chin. "We're satisfied, both of us. Only don't call people crooked without knowin' a little more what you're sayin' about 'em. Bradley's no more crooked than you are." He gathered up the reins and touched the pony with his spurs. "Giddup, hoss. Giddup!"

And he galloped off in a cloud of dust, furious with himself for having risked the meeting. Why had he stopped? He might have known what would happen. The old fool! What did he mean by saying things like that? Lies of course!

He turned in the saddle and saw the man in the buckboard staring after him with his arm thrown over the back of the seat.

Ask money from him? Never! Not while there was breath in his body.

The pony swerved as a ground-squirrel scampered across the road and Dan laughed.

CHAPTER II

THE SHOOTING

ON A NIGHT in August, Dan Cleghorn sat in his shirt-sleeves and stared with moody countenance at a bundle of documents on the table in front of him. It was very hot and still and the air in the small parlor of the ranch-house was close and heavy. The lamp hanging from the ceiling smelled of oil. Through the windows came the steady, persistent creaking of the crickets. From time to time a puff of scorching wind from across the desert would rattle the wire screens.

Dan gave a little sigh of weariness and discontent.

"Seems like there was no chance uh doin' any more," he said. "Is there?"

He raised his head and saw his wife gazing at him with a wistful smile.

"Chance uh doin' any more!" Bradley Armstrong stifled a yawn and shrugged his broad shoulders. "No, Dan, there ain't."

His clean-shaven face, brick red in color and handsome notwithstanding its plumpness, was very mournful, and in his blue eyes showed a look of sympathy and bewilderment and a wish to do all in his power to help a friend.

"We're all of us broke, more or less," he

Digitized by Google

said slowly. "That is, as far as ready money goes."

Dan nodded and dug the point of his knife into the table.

"I don't know," he muttered. "I don't—I don't. An' where's it goin' to end, hey?"

"Oh, it 'ull come out all right at the finish," said Bradley. "Won't it, Eileen?"

"No use worryin', anyways," said the girl.

Dan growled at her under his breath.

"No use in bein' silly, either," he said. He felt a certain resentment that she should be in the room at all. There were some things that no woman could ever hope to understand.

For a minute or two no one spoke, and at last Dan stood up and walked to the screen door leading to the veranda. The heat met him like a draft from a furnace as he stared out into the blackness of the night. Then he turned and gazed at Bradley who leaned against the bureau with his hands deep in his pockets and his chin sunk on his chest.

"Got any suggestion, Bradley?" he asked.

"How about old man Morrison?" said Bradley. "He's a pal uh yours, ain't he? How about askin' him?"

"Old man Morrison!" said Dan slowly. And then the meaning of Bradley's words dawned on him. Ask old man Morrison! He remembered the morning in April when he had last spoken to him.

"That old devil!" he said wrathfully. "Ask *him* fer money? Not on your life!"

"What's worryin' yuh now?" said Bradley. "Hey? You an' he ain't had a fallin' out, have yuh? Thought yuh liked him!"

"Me!" said Dan. "I hate him. Durned old hypocrite! Because he was a friend uh dad's he thinks he can say any doggon' thing he likes. He can't, an' I told him so."

"I've no use fer him either," said Bradley simply.

"I don't wonder. Say, he hates you like pizen. Why? He made me sore the things he said."

"He been sayin' things about me, has he?" said Bradley. "He'll be sorry some uh these days. Durn' sorry. But that ain't sayin' you oughter have fallen out because of that, Dan. He might 'uv been useful."

"Think I'd take money from a man who asked me to throw down a pal!" said Dan indignantly. "Not much I wouldn't."

And looking at Bradley, bigger than himself in every way, both in mind and body, better looking, stronger, the best-liked man for miles, he felt a thrill of pride in the thought that they were friends and that never, never, while life lasted would anything mar their friendship.

"Well," said Bradley. "If yuh can't get nothin' from old man Morrison, Dan, then you've about exhausted yer chances uh gettin' any money at all."

"That's so, I guess," said Dan in a low voice. "That's so, Brad. An' we shut down borin' operations, an'—an' every penny them other folks put into it is lost. Bradley, what are we goin' to do?"

Bradley uttered a nervous laugh.

"*We?* Why Dan I ain't goin' to do nothin'. Why should I? I lost the money I put into it, too. Didn't I? I ain't kickin' am I?"

"No," said Dan quickly. "No you ain't, Bradley. You certainly ain't. But——" He hesitated. Of course Bradley had lost his money, but it had been his own suggestion sinking the well in the first place. Surely the blame was his equally!

"But Bradley, what about the others, hey?"

"Well," said Bradley. "What about them?" He tapped his chin with his fingers. "Because we were told there were indications of oil it don't say we guaranteed it does it?"

"No," said Dan. "No, Bradley, it don't. But—all the same I went out uh my way, kind uh, to persuade folks to buy stock. An'—how'm I goin' to face 'em, hey?"

A feeling of irritation swept over him. Even Bradley had failed to see his point of view. Bradley who was usually so quick to agree with what he said. Or to point out his error when they differed.

"What shall I tell 'em, hey?" he persisted.

"Tell 'em, Dan?" said Bradley—and to all appearance he was quite indifferent—"why, tell 'em you've lost every cent yuh put into it yerself. Tell 'em your wife's money what yuh bought stock with went with your own. There's a hundred things you can tell 'em. What's it matter to you, Dan, what's happened to *them?*"

Dan cleared his throat.

"Bradley," he said, and broke off suddenly.

HIS wife was leaning forward in her chair, her brown eyes wide open with fear, her lips parted and her cheeks pale under the tan.

"Dan," she said, "Dan, what's that?

Digitized by Google

Dan, yuh didn't, did yuh? Yuh didn't put any—put *my* money into that oil uh yours, too!"

Dan caught his breath. The girl, a slender figure in white, rose to her feet and faced him, her hands by her sides and her head thrown back. Something in her look, so different from her usual simple prettiness, frightened him.

"Eileen," he said hoarsely. "Eileen old girl, I——"

"Did yuh put *my* money into oil? Speak, can't yuh? I don't want anything but a plain answer."

"Well, then," said Dan wearily. "I did."

"How did I know you'd mind?" he said.

"How did he know?" The girl laughed. "Bradley," she said, turning to the other man. "Bradley, do you hear that? Dan took my money—he had control of it, every cent—an' lost it in that oil uh his. An' he says now, how did he know I'd mind! Can yuh wonder I'm angry! Can you?"

She faced her husband once more.

"You, Dan, you're no better'n a common thief!"

Dan's hands were shaking as he began to collect the papers scattered over the table.

"If—if I hadn't believed we was goin' to make lots out uh the oil I wouldn't 'uv put my own money into it. Would I? An' if—if we only had a few thousands more we'd make a fortune yet fer all of us."

"I think," said the girl. "I think, Dan, that I almost hate yuh. I do. An' this ain't the first time you've done things behind my back. What right had you to throw away my money, hey?"

"You're my wife ain't yuh?" said Dan.

The girl's cheeks were red, her eyes blazed and she came very close to Dan.

"An' that's the reason, is it? I'm your wife. Your property! Is that so? Well, then, perhaps yuh won't have the opportunity very much longer to do what yuh think you can do." She broke off abruptly. "Oh! what's the good? You'll never learn sense, I guess. Never! An' you stand there like you was injured. I'm your wife, ain't I? I work fer yuh, slave fer yuh, put up with your sulks an' tempers, an' what do I get in return? Nothin'. Nothin' at all! Not even a kind word, or—a kiss. No, Bradley, that's the truth. I'm nothin' to him. Nothin'."

Dan listened in a kind of daze. Could this be Eileen! His wife! His quiet, obedient little wife, to whom his slightest wish was law, who worshiped the ground he trod on?

"Bradley," he said, "I'm sorry fer all this. I—I apologize."

"You what!" said the girl angrily. "*You* apologize! For *me!*" She paused and eyed him scornfully from head to foot. "I think—I think you're the meanest man that ever lived. It ain't the money. That's nothin'. It's everything. Everything! D'yuh hear?"

"What's the use uh quarrelin'?" said Bradley. "Hey? Why not make friends? Come along Eileen, don't be angry! What's the use? Dan didn't mean any—any harm. I'm sure he didn't."

"Is it any business uh yours, Bradley Armstrong? Who asked *you* to interfere? Do yuh think—do yuh mean to say yuh think Dan did right? You're as bad as Dan."

"Cut it out Eileen," said Dan nervously. "What's the good of——"

"Don't you dare say another word!" she said. "Or——"

Smiling nervously, as a man will when face to face with an angry woman, Dan backed away from her.

"Now Eileen," said Bradley. "What's the use of it? It don't do no good—not the least!"

"That's what yuh would say, ain't it?" she said, and walked slowly toward the door that led into the kitchen.

Dan laughed as he watched her. Then as if to show the incident was at an end, he stretched his arms upward wearily. "Gee! I'm tired—dog tired."

BETWEEN the small stove and the third door in the room, one that opened into the front bedroom, was a high shelf on which were books, some odds and ends of harness, a hat or two, a cartridge-belt with its holster empty, and lying on the narrow space that remained, with its long barrel projecting over the edge, an old revolver.

As Dan yawned, his elbow crashed downward on to the shelf. He glanced swiftly over his shoulder in time to see the revolver falling. There was a clatter of iron against iron as it hit the stove, a sharp crack, a spurt of flame, and a bullet tore through the upper panel of the kitchen door.

For a moment there was a deathly silence in the little room.

Digitized by Google

"Pretty close call, that!" Bradley said.

"My God!" said Dan. "It—it—nearly—" He broke off with a little choking noise in his throat. "Eileen," he said, "it might have killed yuh."

The girl made a gesture of indifference. "Well what uh that? It might have been all to the good if it had. An'—" she flashed a look of contempt at Dan—"an' it's just like you, Dan, anyways. Just."

Dan stooped and picked up the revolver. "I'm sorry," he said dully. "How could I know——" He swung round at the sound of quick footsteps. "Who's there?" he called.

The swing screen-door was pulled back and a ranch hand, a tow-headed young man, peered into the small, lamplit room.

"Weren't that shootin'?" he asked. His eyes were fixed on the revolver in Dan's hand. "What happened?"

"Nothin'," said Dan. Only by an effort of will could he keep the quaver from his voice. "Nothin' at all, Jim. I was showin' Bradley the gun an' the blamed thing went off an'—that's all. Didn't think I was tryin' to kill him did yuh?"

"No. Not exactly. Uh course not."

"Why did yuh say that?" said Bradley, after the boy had gone.

"I dunno'," said Dan. "Excep' that he—he mightn't 'uv believed that it went off of its own accord just through fallin' offen the shelf. That's all, Brad. I wouldn't, myself."

"I've told you a hundred times," said the girl, "that there'd be an accident some day. Why do yuh want to keep it at all, hey? What good is it?" She glanced at the hole in the panel of the door. "You don't want it."

"I may," said Dan. "One uh these days I might need a gun, an'— well I'm goin' to keep it."

"Why don't yuh get a new one?" said Bradley. "That durn' thing goes off if yuh look at it. Get another with a safety catch. It ain't right to have an old-fashioned thing like that layin' around."

"No," said Dan. "But this 'ull do, all the same." He was cleaning the barrel as he spoke. "I'll put a nail into the wall an' hang it, so there'll be no danger of it fallin' again."

"I don't like it," said the girl. "You nearly killed me just a minute ago an' I don't want you to kill any one else. It ain't worth it."

"I'm not goin' to kill any one at all," said Dan. "But a man oughter have a gun handy in the house, anyhow."

"Guess I'll be goin' now," said Bradley. "It's late. Good night, Eileen. Good night, Dan, an' whatever yuh do, don't worry. It don't do no good an'—yuh can't do nothin' except hold tight, can yuh?"

He went slowly toward the veranda door, nodded, and let himself out into the darkness.

Dan turned to his wife.

"I'm sorry about the gun," he said.

"It don't matter," she answered listlessly. "Only I don't never want it to happen again."

"It won't," he said. "Uh course it won't."

A gust of wind rattled the screen and the girl shivered.

"You say not. But—somehow I felt just now that it would happen again, an' that one of us three in the room would be killed by that gun. I can't explain but—I seemed to see the whole thing, all blurred, an' one of us dead. I don't understand how—I'm feelin' queer tonight."

"An'—an' which of us was dead?" Dan asked thickly. "Which—you, or me, or Bradley?"

"I don't know," she said. "I couldn't make out. It looked like a man."

Dan burst into a roar of laughter.

"An accident like that don't happen once in a hundred years."

"Maybe next time it won't be an accident," said the girl. She paused and looked at him with an expression in her eyes that drove away all thought of laughter. "I'm goin' to bed now. I'm tired."

CHAPTER III

ADVICE FROM BRADLEY

THE sharp clanging of iron on the triangle that hung on the veranda warned Dan that breakfast was on the table, and dropping the saddle that he was mending he walked out of the barn toward the house.

Eileen had been sleeping, or pretending to sleep, when he had crept silently into their bedroom the previous night. He was up and out of the house before she had awakened. Now they must meet.

He entered the kitchen and seated himself at the table. Eileen placed a dish of

Digitized by Google

fried eggs and bacon in front of him, and he muttered a nervous good morning without turning his head.

"Would yuh like any cakes, Dan?" she asked.

Something in her voice made him look at her. Their eyes met and the color flooded her face.

"Eileen," he said hoarsely, "I want to say I'm sorry fer what I did. I know now I oughn't to have took that money uh yours. But—Eileen, I thought fer sure we'd 'uv struck oil before now. I did so. An' when weeks went by an' there weren't no sign of it, neither in the first two borin's nor in this, then—why *then* I pretty nigh went out uh my mind fer fearin' what you'd say to me. I tried to tell yuh an' I couldn't. That's all Eileen. I'm sorry."

The girl laughed and tucked a curl into its proper place over her ear.

"That's all right, Dan. Perfectly all right. It wasn't your fault that they've not reached the oil. I've been sorry fer you this past six months. An' now—there'll be all them other folks after yuh wantin' to know what yuh done with their money an' when you're goin' to get any returns."

She came over and put her hand on his cheek. He stirred uneasily—she knew he hated to be touched—and the hand fell by her side.

"It ain't their money I mind so much as yours, old girl. Though Lord knows I dunno' what in the world I'm goin' to do! I've just about reached the limit. Just about."

He picked up a fork and spoon and helped himself from the dish. When he reached for the salt he found that the girl was looking at him with a scornful little smile on her lips.

"There's nothin' yuh want is there, Eileen?" he asked. "I thought I—I wouldn't give you your eggs till you'd poured the coffee."

He was frankly puzzled.

"Oh! that's all right," she said. "I ain't hungry this mornin' anyways."

Later she sat opposite to him and sipped her coffee in silence. Accustomed to her moods he talked on as if to himself, needing no answers, thinking deeply the while.

"I guess they'll shut down borin' in a day or so. They've pretty well come to the end uh the money by now. Not a cent more, an' there ain't a ghost of a chance uh gettin' any. I'm strapped to the world. So's Bradley. There ain't a soul in San Nicolas who'll give me a bean. What then? Lord knows! There's the ranch. That's all I got left—the only doggon' thing! An' they'll blame me uh course. *I* know 'em. Felton an' that gang. It's my company. Yes. But it was Bradley had the feller down from Los Angeles to have a look at the property. An'—but fer Bradley an' what he said I'd never have touched it. Not me! It's a darned shame! There's oil there. Heaps of it. It ain't fair that everything should come on my shoulders. Bradley did all he could to get me to go into it. Said the profits ought to be mine. Let me put every darned cent I could raise into it an'——"

Eileen interrupted him.

"Dan," she said. She was leaning forward, her arms folded on the table and her face more set and serious than he had ever seen it.

"Yes."

"Why are yuh talkin' like that? Are yuh tryin' to lay all the blame on Bradley, or what? You were crazy to get into that oil deal weren't yuh? An' why? Because yuh wanted to hog all the profits."

"What's that?" said Dan. "What's that, Eileen?"

The injustice of it all hurt him. If this were what Eileen thought, what would be the opinion of those who hated him?

"Why are yuh blamin' Bradley?" she asked.

"I ain't," he said. "Bradley's the best friend I got in the world. But—but all the same, Eileen, it was him asked me to go into oil. It was his idea from the first. An'—an' I didn't want to put so much money in as I did. I didn't like the risk. An' I didn't know it was goin' to cost so much. But Bradley's only human, ain't he? An' we're friends anyways."

"Friends! So yuh say. He's too good fer yuh, Dan, an' that's the truth."

Dan gulped down a mouthful of coffee.

"There's one thing we agree on anyhow," he said shortly. "Bradley ought to be proud."

"It's a pity *you* ain't then," she retorted. "If you were, perhaps I—Dan do yuh suppose I don't know what people think uh you? What they say?"

"Well," said Dan, steadying his voice.

Digitized by Google

"Well, what is it now? You talk, Eileen, an', talk. Nothin' else."

SHE drummed with her fingers on the table and gazed at him as if trying to read his thoughts.

"I wonder if we made a mistake."

"What ways?"

"In marryin'. There's something about yuh, Dan, I don't savvy. Maybe it's my own fault, but I guess every woman 'ud be the same. You're not like yuh used to be, Dan, two years ago, before I married yuh. I daresay yuh love me still, in a manner, but—yuh don't show it. Once yuh used to kiss me. How often do yuh now? Yuh don't think it matters, uh course. Well a woman likes that kind uh thing—every woman.

"An' then yuh never tell me about your work or your plans. Lord knows I wouldn't have minded yuh havin' my money a hundred times over, but—but yuh might have asked fer it. An' just now when yuh said yuh were sorry an' I said it didn't matter an' that it wasn't your fault, yuh just took it fer granted I'd fergive yuh. I'd said the right thing. I was only your wife. An' what did I count anyways? An' yuh went right on with your breakfast without so much as a look at me to say you were grateful. Can I help bein' hurt at that, Dan?"

Dan, kind-hearted and well-meaning, but more dense in his perceptions than a grown man has any right to be, gave a little sigh. He did not understand his wife's moods. He had said he was sorry and she had told him he need not worry. Why then refer to it again? Why not drop the subject at once and have done with it? Why kisses? Would kissing steer him clear of his troubles? A feeling of irritation came over him. He waited for a moment before speaking.

"I don't understand, Eileen. Not one bit. I said I was sorry an' you said it didn't matter. An' now yuh say I oughter have kissed yuh. Well—an' why? What good does kissin' do? We ain't lovers with nothin' to bother about but makin' love, are we? That's common sense. We're married, an'——"

The girl cut him short by rising to her feet.

"If you've finished your breakfast," she said, "I guess I'll be clearin' up."

"All right," said Dan with a little laugh.

And, after all, why show he was angry? Women were women all the world over. No cause was so small that they could not quarrel over it.

"I guess I'll go over an' talk to Bradley this afternoon—an'— Or may be I'll ask him 'round here again this evenin'." He shot a quick side glance at the girl as she lifted the kettle from the stove. "An'—see here, Eileen. I ain't given up yet, not by a durn' sight. We'll win out somehow. You an' me an' Bradley. An' there's the ranch left us. I'll get to work on that an' see if ranchin' won't pay better'n oil."

She did not answer him, and after a brief pause he pushed open the screen-door and stepped out into the sunshine.

AS he walked across the open, sandy space toward the barn, with the fields of green alfalfa and yellow, burned-up stubble beyond, stretching away toward the slopes covered with brush and the great bare hills of rock, a man called to him from the direction of the windmill and tank that stood by the corral. Dan turned quickly and saw the engineer in charge of the derrick, a small, thick-set man with black hair and a short mustache, approaching him, swaying slightly as if uncertain of his feet.

He waited, biting his lips, flicking his leg with his quirt.

"Mornin' Dennis," he said. "How are yuh?"

"Mornin' Mr. Cleghorn," said the man in a truculent, surly tone. "Mornin'." All at once a sense of injury seemed to sweep aside the commoner forms of politeness. "Say, yuh durn' mis'rable crook, what's it all mean, hey? What's yer game?"

And then Dan realized that he had been drinking.

"Just you so much as lay one finger on me," he said, "an' I'll take the skin offen yer back with this quirt." He swung it viciously. "You're drunk! Git outer here quick! Understand? I won't have any drinkin' round here any time, let alone this hour uh the day. Beat it! You hear me!"

Dennis thrust his hands into the pockets of his overalls and chuckled.

"What do yuh know about that, hey? Dan Cleghorn talkin' like a Methody preacher about temp'rance. Say, Dan, you get more funny each time I look at yuh." The grin vanished from his dirty, oil-smeared face. "Here you piker, what yuh playin' at? What's it—it all mean, hey?"

Digitized by Google

Dan looked at him up and down contemptuously.

"I'll talk when you're sobered up, not before."

"What's that?" raved Dennis. "What's that you're sayin'?" He clenched his fists but kept his distance as if wary of the quirt. "What's that? See here, Mr. Dan Cleghorn, I want my time. Right now! This minute. Where's my check? There's more'n a month's money due me, an' I'm goin' to have it. An' the other boys want theirs as well. See! Now what yuh got to say?" And from his manner he had delivered an unanswerable thrust.

Dan passed the lash of his quirt through his teeth.

"All right. I'll get you your money now. Every cent of it. An' keep a civil tongue in your head else you'll get something else besides your money."

He turned and made his way back to the house.

Later, when he had written the check, he found the engineer waiting on the veranda.

"Got it?" he asked. "Been long enough about it, ain't yuh?"

Dan handed him the piece of paper.

"Take it! An' that's the last money you'll get from me. You don't need to give me a receipt 'cause I've written what it's fer on the face of it. See? Settlement in full." The man was examining the check as if suspicious of being cheated. "An' now," Dan went on, "listen to me. Clear your kit out of the bunk-house right now. At once. See! You're fired. You're too big fer your shoes, Dennis. Suppose yuh think you're the only man south uh Bakersfield that savvys the runnin' of a derrick, hey? There'll be another feller in your job to-morrer mornin'."

Dennis thrust the check into his pocket, and scowled.

"Oh! Another feller in my job tomorrer, hey? Well an' good. But look-a here, Mr. Dan Cleghorn, an' listen to me. You think yerself dam' smart, don't yuh? Well, you ain't then. Not a bit. You're ignorant, that's what *you* are. Ignorant! Oil! Why, what d'yuh think you're goin' to git oil from? Oil! Thar's no more oil in that land uh yours than thar is in San Diego bay. Less, prob'ly. Yuh make me tired. Fire me, do yuh? All right. Fire away. *I* don't give a dâmn; I was goin' to quit, anyways. You wait till I tell every doggon' soul in the county what's been happenin'. Oil! How much did yuh pay them to give you a favorable report? How much did yuh make outer the money them poor suckers in town here give yuh? Yuh cheap little crook!"

"That 'ull do," said Dan sharply. He stepped forward, gripped his shoulders and shook him to and fro. "Git out uh here at once! Understand!"

He loosed his hold and Dennis cannoned against one of the uprights, lost his balance and fell.

He rose to his feet, white with rage.

"You ain't heard the last uh me, Dan Cleghorn, not by a goldarned sight, you ain't." And he limped slowly off in the direction of the bunk-house.

A door opened and Dan turned, a hard smile on his lips, his heart beating unsteadily. His wife stood staring at him.

"It's all right," he said. "It's only Dennis again."

"Oh! Dan, yuh shouldn't. I heard what he said. Yuh shouldn't 'uv lost your temper. You'll be doin' yourself harm, an' yuh know what people are."

"Didn't lose my temper," Dan grunted. "Didn't. I ain't goin' to stand fer that kind uh talk from nobody. An', say, what did he mean? No oil! I don't understand. He's—" And then to comfort him came the recollection that the man was drunk. "He was just shootin' off his mouth, I guess. Talkin' that ways. There's oil there right enough, only—only maybe we'll have to wait a year or two before we can go on with the borin'. It takes money to sink a well, an'——"

"So you have said," said the girl, "about a hundred million times, till I'm sick uh hearin' it. I guess may be Dennis is right, an' there's no oil here at all."

Dan walked away without turning his head.

"I won't be in to dinner," he said.

LATE that afternoon when he had returned to the ranch he found the letter that was to remove his last vestige of hope.

"Letter fer you, Dan. From the bank," Eileen called to him as he entered the parlor.

Dan looked at the writing with a tightening of the lips. Then very deliberately he tore open the envelope.

"Only something about my balance I

Digitized by Google

guess. But I'm not overdrawn—yet, I know."

He read what was in the letter twice before its sense dawned on him. Then he tossed it to one side and swore softly.

"Well of all the doggon' nerve!"

"What is it?" said the girl. "Nothin' wrong, is there?"

"Oh, no!" said Dan. "Oh, no! there never is anything wrong, never! They beg to remind me the mortgage was due on the nineteenth uh last month, an' unless there's a settlement they'll be reluctantly compelled to foreclose. They won't, uh course. But—I wonder what made 'em write like that?"

And this was something else to ponder over, another cause of worry, until Bradley Armstrong was seated on the veranda after supper mocking his fears.

"Foreclose! No, uh course they won't. Why should they? They never said anything about it before, did they?"

"Why no," said Dan. "They certainly didn't. I always understood they'd give me a second mortgage as soon as I wanted it. I'll have a talk with old man Robertson next week. He'll do what's right by me, I know. He's—" A momentary doubt sent a cold chill down his spine. "I dunno' why they wrote this, all the same."

"Matter uh form," said Bradley.

"Hope so," said Dan. "Why I ain't never made an attempt to pay it off. Only the int'rest. I suppose *you* ain't gotten no influence, Bradley, said Dan. "I know yuh own stock in the bank, an' I thought—thought——" He ended with a nervous laugh.

"*Me!*" said Bradley. "I got some shares. Yes. But that don't give me any say in runnin' the bank. What's wrong with yuh tonight, Dan? Nothin's goin' to happen. What are yuh worryin' about?"

"Oh! I dunno'," said Dan. "Everything's wrong somehow. One thing on top of another. Money petered out, Dennis sayin' things, that there's no oil an' never will be, people whisperin' about crooked work, an'—an' on top of everything else—" He glanced over his shoulder into the lamp-lit parlor where his wife was putting away the table-cloth. "Say, you noticed anything queer with Eileen lately?"

Bradley turned in his chair.

"What's that? Queer about Eileen? No. I noticed nothin'. Why?"

"Oh! I dunno', but she's diff'rent from what she used to be. Worryin' an' fussin' about things. She's got fancies, too. Told me last night she knew one of us three was goin' to be killed by that old .45 uh mine. An' see here!" He touched Bradley on the knee. "What d'yuh think now? She says I don't treat her right. Bradley, she's got some dam' fool notion in her head if I loved her I'd—silly, ain't it—I'd kiss her an', so on."

He could feel his cheeks burning as he watched Bradley's red, full-lipped face in the light from the window.

"Well, yuh musn't mind, Dan," Bradley chuckled, "any girl's liable to be a tough proposition to understand, an' Eileen's no diff'rent from any uh them. But—" he frowned and allowed his heavy lids to droop over his eyes—"but if I was you, Danny, I wouldn't pay no attention. It's the hot weather we're having. That's all. Is she still angry about that—that money uh hers, an' the oil?"

"No," said Dan hastily. "Not a bit. But all the same—when I let the matter drop she kind uh turned on me an' said that before we was married I treated her nicer than what I do now." He paused. "Well, what's it mean? She ain't—ain't gettin' tired uh me, Bradley? Yuh don't think that, do yuh?"

It did not seem in the least improper for him to be discussing such topics as this with Bradley Armstrong. A man must seek advice occasionally, and who would advise him better than his dearest friend? Moreover, Bradley had known Eileen almost as long as he had himself, and he liked her. He would be able to tell what would be the wisest and the least troublesome course to take.

"Well!" said Dan after a long pause.

"Well," said Bradley, "if I was you, Dan, I'd—I'd—Oh! I dunno'. Guess maybe I'd try an' impress her a bit more with my—my——" He hesitated. "What yuh oughter do is to make her realize you're her master."

"I see," Dan nodded.

He pondered as to the exact meaning in Bradley's words.

"Be firm with her?" he said.

"Sure," said Bradley. "Be firm. You've got it."

"Oh!" said Dan slowly.

Coming from Bradley the advice must be right. Nevertheless his instinct warned

Digitized by Google

him that he was taking risks. Could he impress upon Eileen that he was her master? He doubted it exceedingly.

"Let's go inside," said Bradley suddenly.

AS THEY entered the front room the girl looked up from her sewing and smiled at Bradley. Dan caught the look and a vague feeling of uneasiness came over him and passed quickly, almost too quickly for him to try and analyze its meaning. But it hurt him to see that she did not so much as glance in his direction until after he had spoken.

"How are things going, Bradley?" she asked.

"Oh, fine!" he said. He looked at Dan. "But—seems like your husband's worryin' about himself, Eileen."

"Oh, him!" There was a certain note of indifference in her voice that Dan resented. It sounded, or would have done had he not known better, as if she did not care. But that she lacked true sympathy was only too obvious; another fault which he might have mentioned to Bradley.

"Worryin' still, is he?" she said.

"Well," said Dan, "an' I've got something to worry over, ain't I? Sometimes I dunno' what in the world's goin' to happen next. I dunno' what I'd do without you, Bradley. I dunno' indeed."

For some moments no one spoke. And then the girl looked up with a little frown between her eyebrows and a curiously mocking expression in her brown eyes.

"Yes, Bradley. Dan's right. Me too. I often wonder what would have become of him but fer you. I do indeed. He's very, very lucky in havin' a friend like you."

And Dan wondered why her praise of Bradley should have sounded overdone. Surely he was not jealous! The very thought of it made him smile. Jealous! Of course not. Eileen was the best wife in the world. And no one could be a better friend than Bradley Armstrong. He was lucky, as Eileen had said.

CHAPTER IV

RUMORS

"HEY! Dan Cleghorn!"

Dan reined in his pony, rejecting almost instantly the idea of pretending that he had never heard.

"You wait.. I want to speak to yuh."

A tall, lean, long-nosed man in a high-crowned Stetson hat and ragged overalls came shambling across the dusty main street of San Nicolas.

"How do, Mr. Felton; how's everything up to the ranch this evenin'? Folks all well?"

"See here, Dan Cleghorn, yuh listen to me a moment. I been chasin' after yuh this past three weeks. You've dodged me so far, but I got yuh now an' I mean to have a few words with yuh."

The smile on Dan's peaked, sunburned face vanished. His eyes narrowed.

"Well," he said. "What is it? I ain't tryin' to dodge no one, least of all you, Felton! Why should I?"

"Why should he?" said the lean man, as if appealing to some higher power to witness the folly of such a statement. "Why should he? Dan, I just wanter tell yuh what I think uh yuh. See! You're a doggon' crook! There! That's what you are. A doggon' crook!"

"I don't understand," said Dan hoarsely. "Are yuh lookin' fer trouble as much as all that? If you want to scrap, say so."

"Scrap!" The lean man glanced over his shoulder at the little group of men outside the blacksmith's shop. "Say, fellers, Dan Cleghorn's doin' the injured innocent act. He wants me to fight him!" He turned once more to Dan, showing his teeth in a snarl under his straggly red mustache. "If yuh try any rough-house work with me you'll be sorry. Understand? Durn' sorry! An' wait—don't go off. Not fer a minute! You're afraid to hear the truth, ain't that it?"

He laid his hand on the bridle and showed his teeth in a snarling grin.

"Afraid!" he snapped!

"Say, what's it all mean?" said Dan. "I ain't got no time to waste on soreheads like you. You've no claim against me, an' yuh know it."

The lean, red-headed man in the overalls gave a sudden yelp of rage.

"You! Yuh piker! Yuh sit there an' say I've no claim ag'in' yuh! Are yuh crazy? Or don't yuh remembers what happens from one day to another? You persuaded me—and how many more I don't know—to put money into that oil proposition uh yours. You got my money under false pretenses an' then—then yuh come back an' say that yuh

Digitized by Google

want more. That the expenses of openin' up was higher than yuh thought. That the other two borin's didn't find no oil but this is bound to—if—if yuh go deep enough. Where's the money that yuh had? Not gone already, has it? It can't have. Where's the oil? Tell me that if yuh can. An' if yuh can't, I will. There ain't any, there never was, an' there never will be."

"Who said there ain't?" said Dan sharply.

"Never yuh mind! But there ain't. What's more, you knew it all along an' yuh trimmed us fine, didn't yuh? Say, Dan Cleghorn, how much money have yuh made out uh the deal, hey?"

Three or four other men drawn by the sound of the argument laughed.

"What the blazes are yuh hintin' at?" said Dan. "Me, made money! I lost every dam' cent I got in the world. I'm ruined!"

"An' a durn' good job, too," said Felton. "First time I ever heard of a crook gettin' beat at his own game."

"Say, Felton." Dan leaned forward over the horn of the saddle. "Say, you cut that out! You know as well as I do, I'm square. What're yuh after anyways. It was Bradley Armstrong suggested we should form a small syndicate to open a well. It was he got a man from Los Angeles to give us a report. Why don't yuh blame Bradley?"

Felton broke in savagely:

"See here, *you*, don't yuh drag Bradley's name into this or you're liable to git into trouble. Bradley put money into the scheme same as us an' he lost it same as us. Think there's any one in San Nicolas don't know that? You played Bradley fer a sucker too. An' he's too square to squeal on a pal. Though what Bradley can see in a thing like you, heaven knows! He's just a stockholder in your company, same as myself, same as Mr. White here, an' Sam Elliott, an' Bud Stephens, an' half a dozen others. An' then yuh turn an' say that he's responsible."

"I didn't," said Dan. He looked from man to man, searching in vain for a sign of friendship. "I said, 'why don't yuh blame *him?*' It's as much his fault as it is mine, ain't it? Mr. White, you know I'm speakin' the truth. Sam, *you* do, don't yuh?"

"Oh, dry up!" said one of the group, "an' beat it. The less we have to do with a cheap crook like you the better. An' don't try an' explain. Because explanations ain't no use anyways."

"We heard all about your oil," said another, "an' we know what chance we have uh gettin' our money back. The work what's been done ain't took all what was subscribed, an' we ain't fools enough to believe it."

"Think the boys workin' on the derrick didn't see through your game?" said Felton. "They came into town laughin' at us. You canned Dennis last week because he knew too much. Oh, yes! You're cute, ain't yuh? But lemme tell yuh, Dan Cleghorn, yuh can't play them games without havin' to pay fer the privilege uh doin' so. Not out here, you can't. We ain't a crowd uh suckers from the cities or back East in the States. You'll have us to reckon with before long, an' don't yuh make any mistake about that."

"Well," said Dan, "if yuh want to believe what ain't true, there's no——"

"Aw! git on out uh here. Beat it home!" Felton let go of the reins. "Beat it!"

AS HE rode off, his nerves raw from the strain of hearing what they thought of him, shame and anger struggling for the mastery, he saw Dennis.

Knowing that he was still within earshot of Felton and the others he would have ridden by without a word. But Dennis called to him and, rather than show that he dreaded the meeting, he waited.

"Well!"

"Hello thar, Mr. Dan Cleghorn, how's oil? Tried to bribe me not to tell on yuh, hey? Tried to make me promise I'd say that we'd strike oil any minute, didn't yuh? Well yuh couldn't! An' when yuh try to buck ag'in' a man like me you're up ag'in' a mighty tough proposition."

"So you're the man what's been sayin' things, hey? All right, I won't forget. No, I ain't comin' any nearer. An' keep your hands away from that gun uh yours. I know you're carryin' one. Your kind always does. I just want to say that you're goin' to be mighty sorry you ever was born. You wait. It's lowerin' myself to talk to a drunken roustabout like you, an' I'll take care the next time I talk, I've something worth sayin'."

As he rode down the wide street the noise of the pony's hoofs beat an accompaniment to his thoughts. His eyes fixed on the hills in front saw nothing.

He understood now how the rumors had

Digitized by Google

spread. But why after so many years should people believe the very worst that was said of him? Surely they knew he was honest!

And then a fresh grievance seized him. Why should he be blamed and not Bradley—if blame there must be? It had been Bradley's idea from the start. How would *he* have known there was oil on his land? Bradley had been in the oil fields in Bakersfield, had studied oil and knew all about it. Bradley had prophesied a fortune for all concerned.

Not that he was sore with Bradley. Why should he be? And he knew that the legal responsibility rested with himself. Bradley had had no more to do with the financing than had Felton or Bud Stephens or Sam Elliott. Moreover, Bradley had lost every cent he had invested in the company.

IT WAS six o'clock when Dan rode slowly up to the barn and dismounted.

"Jim," he shouted. "Oh, Jim!" There was no answering shout, no footsteps, no sound save the creaking of the windmill and the whinny of one of the colts in the corral.

"That's funny!" he said. "Durn' funny!"

Dropping the reins over the pony's head he walked quickly toward the ranch-house.

"Eileen," he called. "Eileen, come here." Again there was no reply and he kicked open the door. "What's up?" he said. "What the devil are yuh doin', Eileen?"

He stood gazing around the empty kitchen, wondering somewhat at its tidiness, noticing that the stove had not been lit and that there was no sign of supper.

A vague dread of something that he did not dare put into words came over him. He whistled to show his courage and then his heart seemed to stop its beating and the blood rushed to his head. On the door was pinned a sheet of note-paper.

He crossed the room and read in a large, sprawling handwriting a note addressed to himself.

I quit. I am not going to work for a crook. Keep yore old money. You only owe me one day, anyhow. They say I must work for sum one else. I have fed the stock and done the chores.

Yours respeckfully,
JAMES CONNOR.

P. S.—Milk in the can. Eggs five. One broke. I have took the dog. He was mine.

Dan laughed harshly. Then he frowned, angry with himself for even having imagined that Eileen could have written it.

But why wasn't she in? Six o'clock and no supper! Was it fair on him after a day such as he had had? He swore under his breath. Every one was against him—even Eileen!

Gradually his anger faded. Surely she too had not deserted him! No sooner had the idea entered his mind than he dismissed it scornfully. Desert him? The very thought was impossible.

But if not—if she had not left him—where was she?

And although he assured himself time and again that he need have no fear, that Eileen would die rather than give him up, there was at the back of his brain a fear that no amount of reasoning could banish.

If she had grown tired of him it would be his own fault. He could blame no one else. The truth was bitter. Had he ever really appreciated her? Or shown that he had? If she would only return to him he would do all that a man could do to prove his regret for the past.

And yet when she walked into the kitchen, just as he was making the coffee, he hid his relief under a blustering anger.

"Where've you been? Nice time to come home, ain't it? I s'pose I don't count any more. *I'm* only your husband. Where've you been?"

SHE stood staring out of the window, her slim figure dark against the gold of the sunset.

"What's the matter, Eileen? Nothin'—nothin' wrong, is there?"

He set down the coffee and waited, struggling with his feelings.

"Can't yuh speak?" he said. "What is it? What the devil's come to yuh? Is it a joke or what?"

She did not stir.

"Jim's quit," he said. And at that she turned. Her cheeks were pale, her eyelids swollen as if from tears.

"Dan," she said. "Dan, do yuh know what they're sayin' about yuh?"

"No," he lied. "What?"

"I just been spending the afternoon over to Mrs. Walker's house, an' I heard there—" She choked down a sob. "They're sayin' you made a lot uh money out uh the oil, Dan, an' that you're—you're crooked." She waited, and Dan gazed at her with a

Digitized by Google

dead feeling in his heart. "Dan, what is it?" She came near him and took hold of him by the arms. "Dan, tell me! What's been happenin' they're sayin' such things about yuh? Mrs. Walker told me. She said I ought to know. Mrs. Felton was there too. I hate that woman, Dan. And—Dan, did yuh make any money out uh the oil? Yuh didn't, did yuh? Dan, you're not crooked, are yuh?"

He pushed her away from him roughly.

"You too?" he said. Then he laughed. "Lord! I might 'uv known it!"

"Well," she said under her breath. "Well, is it true?"

"True!" snarled Dan. "No! Doggon' yuh! It ain't true. An' yuh ought to know it ain't." He made no effort to control his anger. "What d'yuh mean by it? Every dam' story goin' around yuh believe if it's about me. I'm sick an' tired of it. An' yuh call yourself a wife!"

The color came into her cheeks and she drew herself up.

"That will do," she said quietly. "I think sometimes, Dan, that you're out uh your mind. I didn't believe it. I told 'em it was lies, from beginnin' to end. What's more—" She hesitated. "An' anyways what's makin' yuh angry? I didn't blame yuh when yuh took my money without tellin' me, did I? Yuh did that an' yuh owned to it. What was I to think when I'm told yuh took money from other people as well, knowin' they'd never get it back? Mightn't I have had my suspicions? An' then they're sayin' there never was any oil."

He smiled then, and, bent on asserting himself, wondered what he could say that would hurt her most. She needed a lesson and she would have it.

"You believe things like that about me, do yuh?" he said. "Well then believe if yuh want to. I don't care. Only—only it wasn't me that began it, it was Bradley. Your friend Bradley. It was him what got me to go in fer oil. Him! Understand! I've lost every cent I had. Everything. He got me to start up the oil, to put my money into it, an' here I am ruined! An' I went into that mine with him, took up those claims in San Berdoo an' Inyo County an'—what did I make out uh those deals, hey? An' that land! I went shares with him in that eighty acres. What happened to that? Not a red cent did I see! Did I?"

"Yuh got your half in the land, anyways," said the girl. "An' if yuh ain't gotten sense enough to go ahead an' make use of it that ain't Bradley's fault, is it? He's clever an' you ain't. An' no one ain't never breathed a word about *him* not bein' honest. He is, an' yuh know it. What's more, Dan, I'm not goin' to stand fer that kind uh talk from yuh. Understand! I'm not a hired girl. An' never will be. An' I'm tired uh bein' treated like one. I done all I can to help yuh—I stood up fer yuh this afternoon—an' lemme tell yuh things do look mighty black against yuh, Dan, yet when I come in yuh round on me like I'd been tryin' to do yuh an injury behind your back or steal your money."

Dan gazed at her in a daze. The words he had meant to say died on his lips. He muttered under his breath. A sense of shame stole over him. Never before had she seemed so wonderful in every way. Everything about her, her looks, her voice, her manner, combined to humble him. Had his pride permitted he would have taken her in his arms and begged for forgiveness. As it was he clung to the thought that she had slighted him, and sulked.

"An' Dan, listen! There ain't many women would have put up with what I have this past month or so. I'm tired. You're doin' the best yuh can to lose me. When yuh have, maybe you'll be glad. I've been sorry fer yuh always because yuh ain't liked. I thought always it was because the other men round here wasn't as good as yuh. But now—now Dan, all this makes me wonder if there ain't something wrong with yourself. Yuh ain't got a single friend in San Nicolas, only Bradley."

"Seems to me," he said, "yuh like Bradley a little too much."

The color left her cheeks and she steadied herself against the table.

"Don't yuh dare say that again, Dan," she said quietly. "Are yuh mad? Or what?"

His eyes drooped before hers and he turned with a shrug of his shoulders, feeling that he had fallen in his own estimation no less than hers.

LONG after Eileen was in bed Dan sat on the cot in the veranda and brooded over his troubles.

The one person who should have been on his side had turned against him. She did not love him, of that he was positive. And

Digitized by Google

for the time being he forgot his other troubles in this, greater by far than any.

Gradually he fell into a doze, lulled by the creaking of the windmill and the soft breeze from the desert stirring the leaves of the cottonwoods near the house.

Later he thought he heard footsteps and his wife's voice speaking to him. But when he opened his eyes and sat upright the moon had set and he was alone on the veranda.

Somewhere in the foot-hills a coyote howled. Dan shivered and stood up. It was very hot and close even in the open. Then instead of going indoors he slipped off his shoes, threw himself full length on the cot and fell asleep.

CHAPTER V

THE MORTGAGE

THERE were few people 'about when Dan rode slowly toward the bank. But even to pass those few demanded all his courage. Outside the blacksmith's shop four men sat and talked. One was Felton, another Dennis. Their voices came to him clearly in the still heat. Old Mrs. Walker waiting in her buggy at the post-office stared at him without recognition. A man who stood at the door of the pool-room turned and spoke over his shoulder. A jeering laugh answered him.

Betraying no sign of the tumult within him, his face set in a grim smile, Dan dismounted and pulling the reins over the pony's head entered the bank.

"How do, Mr. Robertson," he said easily. "Might I have a word or two with yuh?"

The president of the First State Bank of San Nicolas stared at him over his gold-rimmed spectacles and nodded.

"Just a minute, Mr.—er—Cleghorn!"

And from his manner and the tone in which he addressed him, Dan knew that he could hope for no mercy.

He stood leaning against the sloping desk, letting his eyes wander idly around the little bank with its wooden and glass partition and the two windows heavily barred with iron, until his name was spoken and he looked up to see the stout little man in the spectacles beckoning him into his private room.

"Take a seat, Mr. Cleghorn," he said. "A fine day, ain't it?"

He seated himself and mopped his bald head with a silk handkerchief. Dan watched him in silence, wondering why all this byplay were necessary before settling to business.

"Dunno' when I've been so hot in years," went on the banker, inserting a podgy finger between his collar and neck. "I don't indeed. How's Mrs. Cleghorn bearin' the heat? She's well, ain't she? Seen her the day before yesterday."

Dan cleared his throat.

"Well I guess, Mr. Robertson, it's up to me to do the talkin'. You were expectin' me to drop around some time, weren't yuh?"

"I was, Dan, more'n a week ago. Or maybe two."

"Yuh know why I wanted to see yuh, didn't yuh?"

The banker gave a little cough.

"Why, Dan, yes. I guess I do," and he looked uncomfortable and ill at ease.

"Well what about it?" Dan leaned forward and glared at the little man until he stirred uneasily in his arm-chair and shuffled his feet. "What about that letter, Mr. Robertson? What's it mean?"

He produced the letter from his pocket-book and held it out to the banker, who took it nervously.

"Ah yes! The mortgage, of course."

"Yuh say you'll be compelled to foreclose, ain't that it? Yuh don't mean it, uh course, do yuh?"

Mr. Robertson's red cheeks became yet redder.

"Well, Mr. Cleghorn, well, I'm afraid the mortgage was due on the—ah the nineteenth uh last month, hey?"

"What about it?" said Dan. "The mortgage ain't worth a quarter the value uh the ranch—you said so yourself. Remember? An' yuh told me in the Spring I could have all the time I wanted. Didn't yuh? So I thought—I thought, Mr. Robertson, seein' I'm an old customer uh the bank an' a personal friend uh yours, Mr. Robertson, I thought I'd ask yuh to take a second mortgage. That 'ull make things a heap easier, an' allow me——"

"Wait a minute, Mr. Cleghorn!" The small banker raised a hand. "Listen! It ain't possible. We can't let yuh have another cent on the ranch. We've gone the limit. We can't let yuh have any more time, neither. You ain't paid the last interest even, an' the principal was due here three weeks ago. It's against all the principles of

Digitized by Google

bankin' to—to——" He seemed to lose the main thread of his argument. "See here, Dan, I'm durn' sorry, old man, but I can't do it."

Dan licked his dry lips.

"Well, Mr. Robertson, I guess yuh mean what yuh say." For a brief space he was silent. Then he sighed wearily. "I guess it's all right. I don't understand, that's all. My credit's good. If I had time—an' yuh promised me that—I'd make good what I owe. An'—see here, Mr. Robertson, you're boss here. Why not extend my time? It won't hurt the bank any."

Mr. Robertson shook his head.

"No, Dan, I can't. I would if I could, but I can't. An' I ain't goin' to discuss it more'n I have. I may be president of this bank all right, but I've got the stockholders to consider, an'—Dan, I just can't help you out. That's all there is to it. An' it's no use askin' me, for you can't bring me an argument why I ought to let you have money, but what I can say no to it. An' *no's* all you'll get out uh me. There! I'm real sorry to have to say it, Dan, but that's final."

He stood up and polished his spectacles with his handkerchief. And once more his nervousness came back to him.

"My, but I'll be glad when I get cooled off! I dunno' when I been so hot as this last week. I met a man from off the desert Monday an' he said up around Ludlow an' Daggett the section-gangs on the Santa Fé were like to die with the heat, an' they're greasers at that."

"Well," said Dan. "I guess it ain't much use my stayin' here then." He rose slowly as if suddenly he had aged whole years. "If it's any—any satisfaction, Mr. Robertson, to you, yuh may like to know that you've ruined me. I was countin' on the bank, an'—" he broke off with a high-pitched laugh—"but what's it matter to you, hey? As long as the bank's safe, you ain't worryin' any, are yuh?"

The little banker raised his hands and let them fall again helplessly.

"Dan, yuh don't understand. It——"

"Good-by," said Dan. "Maybe you'll be out to the sale."

He pushed open the door and went out.

AS HE stood on the board sidewalk, blinking stupidly in the glare of the sun, seeing only a blur of blue sky and white houses and gray dust and green pepper trees, wondering at the mockery of life, some one clasped him by the arm, and turning he saw Bradley Armstrong smiling at him.

"Hello there, Dan! What's doin'?" And then when Dan did not answer—"What's the matter, Dan? Nothin' wrong is there? What yuh lookin' like that fer?"

"Lookin' like what?" said Dan. "Bradley, they've turned me down. They've refused to extend my time or—or give me another mortgage. An' me—I'm ruined."

Bradley gave a low whistle.

"By gum, that's tough! That's awful tough, Dan. What'd they—oh ——! They can't have!" His concern was obvious.

"Yes," said Dan heavily. "They have. An' now, I ain't gotten a cent in the world, not one! An' they'll sell up the ranch an'—what then? Hey, Bradley? What then?"

Lurching across the wide, dusty street came old man Morrison, dirty, sunburned, graybearded and ponderous, clad in an old khaki shirt and trousers that did not quite meet about his waist, his face half hidden by his big hat.

"There's that old devil Morrison!" said Bradley. "What's *he* want?"

"Dunno'. Wish to blazes he'd keep out uh my way. Always when he ain't wanted——" But he held his ground doggedly, nevertheless.

"Guess I'll beat it, Dan," said Bradley. "I'll be 'round tonight though, same as usual."

"Don't go, Bradley!" Old man Morrison's voice boomed out cheerfully. "I ain't seen yuh in six months, not to speak to. Yuh ain't gettin' proud are yuh?"

Bradley scowled.

"How are yuh, Mr. Morrison!"

"Fine as silk," said the old man.

He halted and gazed first at Bradley and then at Dan, then back again at Bradley, his small eyes twinkling as if in acknowledgment of some stupendous jest.

"How's oil, Bradley?" he said. "Makin' a fortune these days? Oil's as good as anything, ain't it? Good as real estate or goldmines any day?" He chuckled. "You an' Dan been goin' into any more speculations, hey? No. I ain't surprised. Dan ain't got much of a head fer finance, has he? In fact between you an' me, Bradley, Dan's rather simple. Ain't yuh Dan? Was from a boy." And he winked fatuously at Dan who stood glaring at him with angry bewilderment. "Well I guess you'll be a rich

Digitized by Google

man before long, the ways you're goin', Bradley. Awful rich! Dan he'll be poorer than last year's straw."

Dan glanced uneasily at Bradley and saw that his face had lost some of its color and that while he smiled the smile was forced and artificial.

"What are yuh talkin' about, Mr. Morrison? I don't understand."

"Don't yuh, Bradley? Don't yuh? I'm sorry. Heat too much fer yuh? Hope not. Tell yuh what, Bradley, what yuh ought to do is to copy them Prophets. I think it was the Prophets. It doesn't matter anyways, Prophets or Pharisees. I mean them fellers who went around anointin' themselves with oil. Ever tried that? It seems like it ought to be good in hot weather. An' if yuh want oil why I'm sure thar's plenty up to Dan's place. Ain't thar Dan?"

Bradley muttered something under his breath, and the old man eyed him in seeming admiration.

"Why that's so, Bradley. That's so. Thar's oil thar, too, I dessay. Burnin' oil! As fer oil on Dan's ranch you oughter know! *You* started the boom didn't yuh? Surely. An' say, yuh don't mean to say that they've quit borin'! Why, Dan, that's awful! Ain't it? Just awful! Did you ever? Fer the land's sake! My! ain't that curious? After Bradley takin' such pains to make things go."

Bradley swung round on him.

"See here, Mr. Morrison, you're an old man an' I got to remember that. All the same, you cut that kind uh talk out. Right now. You're too free with your insinuations. I'd no more to do with Dan's oil than—than any other subscriber. What's more, you know it."

Mr. Morrison, in no wise perturbed, scratched his bare chest thoughtfully. "Jus' so. Jus' so." He turned to Dan.

"Well, Danny, larnin' sense in yer old age? 'Bout time anyways. Say, you'll be comin' to me fer help within the week, won't yuh? Uh course yuh will. Ride over any day yuh like. Say, remember that day in April the last time I seen yuh to speak to? I told yuh then you'd lose every cent yuh had, didn't I? An' Dan, remember what I said about yuh findin' out the truth in six months! The six months ain't up, but what I said 'ull come true, sure as you live."

Dan tried to say something, but speech died on his lips.

Bradley, who seemed to have recovered his self-possession, laughed.

"Well, say, this is great. Quite a treat meetin' a man like Mr. Morrison here. There ain't much society an' amusement in San Nicolas an' I ain't had such an enjoyable time since the last church social they gave. You're all right, Mr. Morrison. Funnier than a movin'-picture."

"Ah! The same old Bradley, ain't it!" Mr. Morrison nodded and plucked gently at his beard. "Well, I got to be goin' into the bank on business. Fine weather we're havin', ain't we? Say, I've been talkin' to that engineer uh the derrick outfit, Dan. He's a real int'restin' young man. Fine flow uh conversation. Finer flow uh that than thar was of oil. Poor opinion uh you, Dan. An' I ain't surprised if what he ses is true. Ain't surprised in the least."

He crossed the sidewalk and stood on the step of the bank.

"Oh say, Dan! Yuh remember me sayin' I didn't know what the game was, don't yuh? Yuh know what I mean, hey? Well, then—" he nodded with a great show of caution—"I found out. An' say, Dan, you're a bigger fool than I thought yuh. I guess I'll see yuh next week, hey?"

Dan laughed harshly.

"Not if *I've* anything to do with it, yuh won't. No sir!"

MR. MORRISON disappeared into the bank, still chuckling and wheezing. Bradley sneered.

"Nice, pleasant, lovable old gentleman, ain't he? Damned, interferin' old mossback! If he weren't his age, I'd—" He clenched his fists suggestively.

"I dunno' what in the world he's drivin' at," said Dan heavily. "Sayin' them kind uh things! Bats, I guess."

"Well," said Bradley, "I'll be pushin' off, Dan. The mules 'ull be shod by this time, an' I want to speak to Harvey. Shall I see yuh tonight?"

Dan shook himself into action.

"Tonight? Why sure! Brad I want to talk things over. I'm up against it. Yuh will come, won't yuh?"

He watched Bradley as he walked leisurely across the street to the blacksmith's, saw him stop and speak to Felton and one or two others, and then with a little sigh mounted his pony and rode off.

Once again a laugh reached his ears. His

Digitized by Google

cheeks burned but he gave no sign that he had heard.

Did they all know? Was there a single soul who had not already heard? What did it all mean? He was puzzled and hurt, like a child in the presence of something beyond all understanding.

He thought of his interview with Mr. Robertson and the bank's decision, of old man Morrison and his grim laughter, of Bradley and his sympathy, of Felton and Dennis, of Eileen, and his brain seemed to give way under the burden. And why should this ruin have overtaken him? What had he done that Fate should have singled him out and dealt him such blows? He was unpopular he knew. Did he deserve his unpopularity? He tried to picture what would have been said of him had he been Bradley, with all Bradley's gift of making friends.

Somehow his imagination failed him.

HE SPENT the remainder of the long, hot afternoon wandering aimlessly around the ranch, a prey to despair, without hope, dreading what fresh disaster the future might bring to him.

Although he had had glimpses of her white waist and skirt from across the fields of stubble, not until supper-time did he see Eileen to speak to. And then the memory of what had happened made speech difficult. To mention his interview at the bank was impossible. Yet because she on her part did not question him he felt aggrieved. And because he knew that she was watching him narrowly he was nervous and ill at ease.

When Bradley came, the tension was relaxed.

"Hello folks," he said cheerily. "It's great to be here. You've no idea how dull it is over to my place."

Dan laughed, though he felt little like laughter.

"You oughter get married, Bradley. Why don't yuh?"

"Yes," said the girl. "Why don't yuh, Bradley?"

"Perhaps I will," said Bradley. "Stranger things have happened than that, ain't they?"

Dan stood up suddenly and took a few turns up and down the room, his hands in his pockets, his eyes staring at the planks of the floor.

"I wish you'd sit down again, Dan," said the girl. "It's too hot to have any one fidgetin' that ways!"

Dan halted and stared at the cartridge-belt and revolver that now hung from a nail under the shelf.

"Say Bradley, it's two weeks, about, since the night that gun went off an' pretty near killed Eileen. Gave me a scare I ain't gotten over yet."

"I guess yuh wouldn't have minded so awful much," said the girl bitterly.

"Why, no," said Dan. "Why, no; uh course not. Maybe yuh wish it had, hey?"

"Maybe I do. Life ain't so awful pleasant with you, Dan. Any one 'ud think —well, yuh ain't listenin', so I won't talk."

"Bradley," he said suddenly, "what'm I to do?"

"How do yuh mean?" said Bradley sitting upright in his chair.

"You know right enough," said Dan knitting his forehead. "What's the sense in beatin' about, Bradley? Let's talk plain."

For a moment it looked as if Bradley were going to burst out in a flare of anger. And then the blood came back to his face and he laughed.

"Talk plain, hey? Go ahead, Dan!"

"What I mean is," said Dan thickly, "what I mean is, what ought I to do? Leave San Nicolas or what? There's nothin' here fer me, is there?"

"What do yuh mean, leave San Nicolas?" asked Eileen quickly. "Why should yuh leave?"

"What, ain't yuh heard that?" said Dan with an air of exaggerated surprise. "Didn't they tell yuh, some uh your kind friends, that the ranch was goin' to be sold up to pay off the mortgage? It is, then, an' that means the end uh me. I ain't gotten a thing left in the world except some land I bought with Bradley an' can't do nothin' with, an' a gold-mine that ain't got no gold."

Eileen made a little choking noise in her throat.

"What's that? An'—an'—Oh, Dan!"

It was not sympathy, he knew. And if not! He hated hypocrisy more than anything.

"Well!" said Dan. "You're glad, ain't yuh?"

She sank back into the chair, a curious, smoldering anger in her eyes, her small, white teeth pressed into her lower lip.

"There ain't a livin' soul 'round here that ain't glad. Only—only Bradley." He loosened his shirt at the neck. "An' now—now what's to be done? I ain't goin' to

Digitized by Google

stay on in San Nicolas. That's straight."

"Where are yuh goin', then?" asked Bradley.

"Dunno'. I don't give a darn where, so long as I get work. Nothin' else matters only that."

Bradley rested his chin on his fists.

"H'm! Yuh know best, Dan. I ain't goin' to try an' persuade yuh against your will. That's no good, is it? But—but—" He glanced at the girl sitting very still and silent in the big chair. "What about Eileen here? What are yuh goin' to do with her?"

"I don't know," he said. "She can't come with me, that's certain. An' she's gotten no people to go to, neither. I——" He hesitated.

"Oh! don't mind about me," said Eileen without raising her eyes. "I don't count. I can look after myself."

"Yuh probably can," said Dan roughly. "I don't doubt it."

"There's no reason fer yuh to say so, anyhow," said the girl.

"Ain't there?" said Dan. "Why not?" And he knew that for some reason or other he was losing his temper. "Why shouldn't I say it?"

THE girl did not answer him, but spoke to Bradley.

"What do yuh think I'd better do, Bradley? I can't go with Dan, uh course. He doesn't want me. Funny kind of a husband ain't he? So pleasant! You've had a sample uh how he goes on! Enough to make any girl fond uh him, ain't it?"

"Eileen," said Dan, "cut that out! Makin' a show uh yourself! What's come to yuh?"

"Now Dan," said Bradley, laying a hand on his arm. "Now Dan. It ain't no good gettin' mad. She don't mean anything. What's the use of it?"

"Well what's she keep sayin' things like that fer?" he said.

"Who started it?" said the girl. "You did an' yuh know it! I tell yuh, Bradley, Dan treats me like I was something beneath his notice. Something mean. I always done all I could fer him—always. But now I'm tired. Dan, you want me to leave yuh, uh course. You have wanted it fer months. Think I'm blind!"

Dry eyed, pale and trembling, she glared at Dan who laughed harshly.

"I'll get on all right without him. I'm twenty-one. Other girls my age earn their own livin', why shouldn't I? I'll go down to San Diego or somewheres an' learn to pack lemons. I won't starve. Or there's other things I can do, easy."

"That's ridiculous," said Bradley. "Quite. Yuh can't. I won't hear of it."

"You!" said the girl sharply.

Bradley nodded.

"Me! I'm as old a friend as yuh got, Eileen, an' I've some right to speak as a friend."

The girl rose to her feet and walked quickly out of the room.

Dan laughed.

"That's her all over. She doesn't care what becomes uh me. Not a darn! I'm no more to her than any other man. That's the truth."

And Bradley did not contradict him.

For some minutes they sat and smoked without speaking, and then Dan looked across through the smoke at his friend.

"Well Bradley, what were yuh goin' to say? What's to become of her?"

Bradley took the pipe out of his mouth.

"Dan we're friends, you an' me, ain't we? An' you're up against it! If I'd had the money this 'ud never have happened. But I ain't got a cent to spare. An' Dan, yuh know as well as I do that you'd be welcome as rain in Spring to stay with me as long as yuh liked. All the same I guess you'd turn me down quick if I asked yuh, wouldn't yuh? If so, it ain't much use your stoppin' on in San Nicolas, is it? There's no work here anyways. But you're not to worry about Eileen. There's that cottage uh mine that the Feltons used to have. It ain't been rented now fer more'n a year. Eileen could live there as long as she wanted to. She'd be among friends, an' between us we'd take care she didn't starve. That's all nonsense her talkin' about goin' off an' earnin' her livin'. Maybe we'd get her the job of postmistress. Old man Haggett's got too much to attend to in the store without worryin' about the post-office, an' he asked me only this week if I knew who'd be likely to suit. So that's as good as settled."

Dan nodded.

"If she wants to take it she will. If she don't, no power on earth will make her. That's Eileen. I'm grateful, Bradley, uh course. You've been a good friend to me an' Eileen all through."

Digitized by Google

"Forget it!" said Bradley. "What I done ain't much!"

The thought, to be dismissed immediately as unworthy, came into Dan's mind, that in that Bradley was right. What *had* he done? Nothing. And then he remembered how of all men Bradley had stood by his side in his trouble, and he felt ashamed of his doubts.

"Funny how things come about, ain't it?" he said. "How was I to know when I started off in that oil game that within a year I was goin' to be ruined! It's hard, somehow. An' every one's against me. That's harder. It ain't my fault is it, Brad? That oil expert said that the indications was better than any he'd seen south uh Bakersfield or Fullerton. An' yet—well yuh know how much oil we've struck. Not a lick. They blame *me*. Why? Why me? I asked 'em to put money in, I know. But—*I* put in more than all uh them put together. Twice as much, an' includin' yuh. An' say, Bradley, it's tough ain't it? What makes 'em blame me any more'n yuh?"

"I put all the money I could afford into it, Dan. An' yuh know yourself I've had heavy calls on my purse uh late, don't yuh? Why should I be blamed? No, Dan, that ain't friendly."

"Why, Bradley, I didn't mean *you* were to blame any. I didn't. You ain't. I only meant that I don't see what makes every one say I'm crooked. That's all. Yuh never heard any reason, did yuh? Yuh know Felton an' that crowd an' maybe you've heard them talk!"

And Bradley looked so honestly hurt as he shook his head that once again Dan felt that he had been cruel. Where would he find a truer and better friend than Bradley Armstrong?

After a long silence Bradley rose to his feet.

"Well, Dan, I got to be goin'."

"What's your hurry?"

"Dunno'. Sleepy."

"If yuh want to I won't stop yuh. I guess I'll be leavin' San Nicolas pretty soon, Brad, I been thinkin'. It's the only thing."

AN HOUR later he went to the door of the bed-room and turning the handle found that it was locked. He listened, wondering nervously what had happened, and a faint sobbing came to his ears. Strangely depressed as to the cause, he walked out through the parlor on to the veranda and flung himself down on the cot.

He lay awake for long hours, thinking, his brain too active for sleep.

Eileen hated him, of course. And in the mood that held him in its grip he felt that she was right. What did she owe him but unhappiness?

He had treated her cruelly. To know that she pitied him would have eased the load he had to bear. And yet the knowledge that she wished to leave him made his going the less hard.

More than ever before did he feel that he was alone in the world. Eileen's affection and respect he had taken for granted. Others might hate him, others might speak behind his back, but Eileen believed in him.

And now he found that she, too, had gone over to the enemy.

Once again he tried to gather what comfort might be gathered from the thought that whatever happened, there was Bradley. But for some reason or other Bradley's friendship seemed suddenly to have lost its value.

If Eileen no longer cared for him, nothing in the world mattered.

The sky was a pale yellow in the east when a hand on his shoulder woke him. He started up to find Eileen by his side, shivering with fear.

"Dan! Oh Dan! Wake up!"

"What is it?" he asked. "Hey? What's wrong?"

"I've had a dream, Dan. Such an awful dream! It frightened me. I thought—thought that you an' me an' Bradley were in the parlor together, an' the gun went off an' killed——"

"Fer Heaven's sake!" said Dan in fierce anger. "An' yuh come an' wake me just to tell me you've had a dream! I'm goin' to sleep again——"

He punched the pillow into shape.

"But Dan—*Dan!* Yuh don't understand. It was like I seen it with my own eyes. Everything. You an' me an' Bradley. Yuh had words over something, an' yuh an' Bradley quarreled, an' he took that old .45 from the wall an' killed yuh. I seen yuh layin' on the floor, dead."

"Don't be a durn' fool!" said Dan. "Dreamin' things!"

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VI

OLD MAN MORRISON GIVES ADVICE

STRADDLING the topmost bar of the corral Dan gazed through puckered eyelids at the ranch-house, half covered by tangled, withered vines, and the live oaks beyond, and the fields of yellow stubble where horses grazed, and the tall derrick rose like a scaffold. Everything looked bare and grimy in the morning sunlight, even the rolling foot-hills and the mountains. Even the blue sky itself seemed different.

A sudden loathing of the place made him shiver. And yet the thought of having to earn his daily bread elsewhere sickened him.

Eileen's future was still worrying him. How would she live when they had parted? She had friends of course. But what kind of friends? Bradley had promised to take her into his charge. It was kind of him, very. And yet—Dan frowned and pressed his teeth into his lip. Why should Bradley burden himself with the care of another man's wife?

Was there no way by which he could preserve his last expiring flicker of self-respect? He was ruined, despised by all, a bankrupt, but there yet remained to him a certain pride. The offer for which he had been grateful the night before now seemed an insult. Why, he did not know!

If Dan Cleghorn's wife had to depend on another man for her daily bread, that man at least would not be Bradley Armstrong! An unreasonable, illogical jealousy of the friend who had stood by him in his trouble tormented him. Bradley had everything. Why should this privilege be his also? Was there no one else who would be able and willing to provide? There was, of course. And Dan threw back his head and laughed as the thought of old man Morrison flashed into his mind.

He would humble himself, and like some beggar go to the man who had prophesied his downfall and rejoiced to find his prophecy fulfilled. Nor would it be to seek help for himself, that was unthinkable, but for Eileen. In his care Eileen would be free from all fear of want. Knowing that she was safe, he could depart wheresoever he wished to find, not a fortune, but a bare livelihood.

EILEEN came out on to the veranda and stood for a while looking out toward the hills. He slid off the bar of the corral and walked quickly toward her.

She glanced at him without showing any change of expression.

"Eileen," he began. And a certain shyness which breakfast, a silent meal eaten in haste, had not removed, swept over him as he faced her.

"Well," she said coolly.

"I guess I'll be away all day." Again he hesitated and then gave an excuse at random. "I got to see after some cattle over at Silver's. An' they'll prob'ly keep me there till tomorrer. D'yuh mind?"

"Mind!" said the girl, raising her eyebrows. "No. Why should I?"

"I mean—yuh won't be lonesome with no one in the house!"

"I got to get used to that, ain't I?" she said. "Might as well begin at once."

"All right, Eileen," he nodded.

The girl, slim and straight in her khaki shirt and short riding-skirts, turned and once more stood with her brown eyes fixed on the distant hills. The sun glinted through the green of the vines on her hair, making it like gold. Her profile, clear cut as a cameo, showed pale and delicate against the side of the house. Her hands were clasped behind her back. One foot in its tan riding-boot tapped impatiently on the boards of the veranda.

Dan watched her without speaking. This was his wife whom he was leaving. It was hard somehow, yet his own fault. Had he not feared her anger he would have taken her in his arms and asked for forgiveness. But the time for that had passed. It was too late. And he, her husband, whether she liked him or not, could not provide for her!

He rode off, taking the trail that led through the brush, over the hill, to Bradley Armstrong's.

BRADLEY was leaning against a fence talking to Sam Elliott.

"Why, hello, Dan!" said Bradley. "What brings yuh round here this hour, hey? Nothin' wrong, is there?"

"Wrong!" said Sam Elliott with a curl of his lips. "What could be wrong with *him*, Bradley? What yuh askin' dam' fool questions like-a that fer?"

"Say, Bradley—" Dan disregarded the

Digitized by Google

other man entirely—"I just was thinkin' I'd look in an' tell yuh I was bound fer Silver's an' I won't be back till tomorrer. I got some steers over there an' I heard maybe there's a chance uh shippin' 'em to the coast."

"To Silver's, hey?" said Bradley thoughtfully. "I see."

"Yes, an' I thought maybe you'd be comin' over tonight, thinkin' I was home an' missin' me, so I stopped off here to tell yuh I wouldn't be in."

"Right," said Bradley. "Thanks very much. How's everything up to the house?"

"Finer'n silk," said Dan, eying Sam Elliott with stony countenance.

"Say." Sam, short of stature, broad in the shoulder and bow-legged, grinned up at him. "Say, how much money did yuh really make out uh that oil proposition uh yours, Dan? The b'ys were wonderin' last night what it amounted to. Yuh done real well out uh that, didn't yuh? Felton an' me, an' Bud Stephens, an' Mr. White, an' Harry Harland, an' Percy Webb, an' I dunno' who else, was talkin' it over. San Nicolas ain't gotten much to boast of, but since this boom in oil yuh pulled off we been just a little proud uh havin' yuh with us. Some uh the b'ys was talkin' uh givin' yuh a little something to remember us by when you're away from us all."

And Dan, seated very erect in the saddle, saw the wink which he gave Bradley.

"Bradley," he said bending down, "Bradley, what's this sawed-off little runt been sayin,' hey? Has he been tellin' yuh lies about me? If so——"

He loosened his right foot in the stirrup. But Bradley laid a hand on his arm.

"Now Dan, now! There ain't anything to get heat up over. Sam's only joshin' yuh. Sam's sore because he lost ten dollars or so an'——"

"Ten nothin'!" snapped Sam. "Two hundred bones." He shot an angry glance at Bradley. "Maybe it ain't nothin' compared to what *you* dropped, but it's more'n I like to give away without gittin' nothin' in return fer it."

"See here, Sam Elliott, yuh came to me yourself an' offered to subscribe. Didn't yuh? Speak up can't yuh? An' see here, if yuh want trouble you're goin' the best way to git it right now. Yuh ain't had much of a reputation fer likin' a scrap so far, not as a boy even, an' now's your time to make up fer what's gone."

"Bradley, why do yuh stand fer a thing like that comin' around talkin'? I wouldn't have him on my place if I was paid so much an hour."

Bradley smiled as he stroked the pony's neck.

"That's all right, Dan. Sam came over on business. See yuh tomorrer then, hey? An' say, Dan," he lowered his voice almost to a whisper, "whatever happens yuh know that I'm with yuh, don't yuh?"

And at that all Dan's doubts vanished. His belief in the old Bradley returned in full force. Of course Bradley believed in him! Why shouldn't he?

"Oh! I knew *that*," said Dan. "Knew it all along. An' it 'ud take a bigger an' better man than Sam Elliott to faze me. Bigger an' better! Well I got to be pushin' off if I want to reach Silver's this afternoon."

"So long, Dan. See yuh tomorrer, hey?"

"You betcher. Good-by."

And Dan rode off through the mesquite and greasewood toward the trail that led across the hills to Silver's, whistling as if to show that at last his cares had left him.

He was glad, boyishly glad, that Bradley believed in him still and would stand up for him before others. Even so, Bradley was not rich and Dan had no desire to be indebted to him for more than he was already; also as regards Eileen his plans were made.

TWO hours later, seated in the shade of oak trees on the crest of the ridge, he heard the sound of wheels. Turning his head he saw the white horse and buckboard of old man Morrison approaching slowly.

He jumped to his feet and waited in the middle of the road.

"Why Dan, what in the world are yuh doin' thar, hey?" Old man Morrison leaned forward. "Off your beat, ain't it? Goin' to Silver's?"

"I told 'em I was," said Dan, "but I weren't goin' as far, matter uh fact." He paused and moistened his lips. "Matter uh fact, I was comin' to see you, Mr. Morrison."

"Ah!" The old man nodded gravely. "Thought as much. For what? Money?"

"Yes, Mr. Morrison. Fer money."

"Ah!" Again he nodded. "Thought it 'ud come to this. Yuh come to me fer money, do yuh, Dan? I said so didn't I?

Digitized by Google

An' what am I goin' to answer? Yes or no. Which is it to be, Dan?"

He glared at Dan, his long fingers plucking at his beard and his jaws moving steadily as he chewed.

"Mr. Morrison," said Dan, "yuh said I'd come to you fer money an' I am. But listen, it ain't fer me. It ain't that. I digged my own grave an' I can lay in it. It's not fer me, it's fer Eileen. She's——"

"Wait a bit Dan, wait a bit!"

SLOWLY and clumsily he climbed out of the buckboard, dragging after him a long rein with a weight attached which he tied to the white horse's bridle.

"Now let's set down an' have a talk." He seated himself on a rock under the trees. "Hot, ain't it? Guess there's goin' to be no let-up in the heat till October, an' maybe not then."

"Mr. Morrison." Dan hesitated.

"Go ahead Danny," said the old man. "I'm toler'bly int'rested in your affairs. Seems like I never met a man yet who'd gotten himself in such a mess just through bein' too pig-headed to use his brains. Just begin at the beginnin' an' let's have the whole thing." He put his hand into his trouser pocket. "Chew?" he said.

"No thanks," said Dan.

"Powerful aid to settlin' the stomick," said Mr. Morrison. "You go ahead then an' let's have it."

So Dan, staring dreamy-eyed across the mountains and peaks toward the hills of Mexico, dimly blue in the far distance, related the story of his search for wealth; how ranching had led to real estate and real estate to gold-mines and gold-mines to oil; ending with his interview with the bank-president and the news that the ranch would be sold to pay off the mortgage. Old man Morrison chewed tobacco, from time to time grunting his disgust and amusement.

"An'," said Dan finally, "that's the whole thing, Mr. Morrison, from beginnin' to end. It's come at last. I've got to leave San Nicolas and work as a ranch-hand at wages. There ain't no other way. If it hadn't been fer Bradley Armstrong I'd 'uv given up ages ago. He stood by me the whole time. Even when people were sayin' I was a crook an' had stolen their money, Bradley did all he could to persuade 'em I wasn't. He's been a good friend has Bradley. He has, indeed."

"Oh!" said Mr. Morrison. "So Bradley's been a good friend to yuh, has he?"

"Sure he has," said Dan. "I know yuh don't like him, Mr. Morrison, but all the same he'd do anything to get me out uh this fix. He can't 'cause he ain't gotten the money. An' so—so that's why I come to yuh to know if you'd be willin' to help me out as regards Eileen. She's no home an' no money nor nothin'. I can't take her with me, an' I don't want her to have to go into San Diego or one uh them places to earn her own livin'. She's been actin' queer uh late, Eileen has, I dunno' why. Just like she didn't care what become uh me—or her. I don't understand her these days, Mr. Morrison, an' that's a fact."

"Wait a bit, Dan! Don't be in such an all-fired hurry. I ain't as spry as I useter be before I put on flesh, an' your style uh conversation don't give a feller time to digest his dinner. An' so Eileen ain't satisfactory these days, is she? Well, well! What d'yuh know about that, hey?" He gazed at Dan with his huge head tilted to one side. And then the smile left his face and he leaned forward and spoke in a deep growl. "Now see here, Dan, that story uh yours was mighty int'restin'. Showin' how many kinds of a dam' fool Tom Cleghorn's son is. It 'ud been a durn' sight more int'restin' to me though if it 'ud been new."

"What d'yuh mean, Mr. Morrison?" said Dan, watching a horned toad sunning itself on a nearby rock.

"Remember that day in April when I met yuh on the road near San Nicolas, an' yesterday outside the bank! Yuh don't understand, hey? Good boy, Danny. Some day you'll grow up an' you'll be a credit to us all. Won't yuh? I've known all along what yuh been tellin' me. An' thar's other things more important than that, which yuh don't know nothin' of."

"I don't understand, Mr. Morrison."

"There's Bradley, won't he look after the girl fer yuh?"

Dan hesitated and groped in his mind for an answer, furious with himself for having to give a reason when, as he knew, there was no reason to give.

"Sure he would, but I thought—thought he'd done more'n enough fer me already without havin' my wife on his hands. He's hard pushed fer money as it is."

Digitized by Google

MR. MORRISON threw back his head and laughed so loudly that the horned toad puffed itself out with anger and alarm and retreated into the brush.

"Oh, Dan! You'll be the death uh me, but you've more sense than I thought for.

"Listen, Dan, an' don't interrupt or I'll git sore with yuh. It's about Bradley. Your friend, Bradley Armstrong, what's been so good to yuh! Are you quite blind, Dan? Bradley your friend? ——! He's no more your friend than I'm his. *You* a crook! Yuh don't know what bein' crooked is. If yuh did you'd never be what yuh are now.

"Bradley's the crook. He's worse'n a crook. He's a liar, a thief, a low-down talker behind other folks' backs. Yeller all through. Think I don't know what's been goin' on? Oh shucks! Yuh make me tired, Dan. That Bradley—hes' been tryin' his best to ruin yuh fer—fer this past eighteen months. Why? Because he hates yuh!

"An' yuh think he's been tryin' to help, hey? How? What's he done? Nothin'. Now see here! It's no good gittin' sore, Dan. This is serious, more serious than anything else that ever happened. What's been goin' on in San Nicolas? A whole lot. Some one's been knockin' yuh uh course. They talk about yuh as mean, too mean to live, as a crook who's tryin' to git rich at their expense. They say yuh made thousands out uh that oil uh yours. Did yuh?"

"Me?" said Dan. "Me? I ain't got a cent to my name."

"Uh course yuh ain't. You're down an' out, broke, without a bean. Tell 'em that till you're blue in the face an' they wouldn't believe it. Why not? Because uh what Bradley's been sayin'. Yes, Dan, that's the truth. Who first put the idee into your head thar was oil on your land?"

"Why Bradley did."

"Yes, Bradley. Who got the man down from Los Angeles to investigate?"

"Bradley," said Dan, "but Mr. Morrison I——"

"Wait a bit! Who asked yuh to start the thing up in a small way among the folks here, so's to keep the profits in your own place? Bradley did. He persuaded yuh to look after the money end of it didn't he? He was only a figure-head, deluded by what yuh told him, persuaded to invest his hard earned savin's in stock. That's what he's been tellin' 'em. He says he lost money. Uh course he lost money. But how much has he made in other things just on account uh that oil rumor uh his? I don't like to think.

"Dan it ain't *you* that's gotten the bank account in San Diego an' El Cajon an' Escondido an' other places. It's Bradley Armstrong. Oh! He's wise, is Bradley. Wise as an old coyote. Oil? Thar's dam' little oil between here an' Arizona. Dam' little! Except what's in the grocery-stores. He fixed it all right. Dug into his pocket an' set an example to others.

"Dan, they say money talks. No such thing. It shouts. An' listen! He sold that land uh his on the strength uh that oil uh yours. It lays next you don't it? He says he ain't made no money out uh it, but he has. An' the money he made didn't go to pay off what he owed on something else north uh here. No sir-ee! I know that fer a fact. It's my business to know. He just naturally turned about an' put it into the bank, ready fer investin' in somethin' else.

"Same way wi' those minin' deals uh his. He lost money on them, didn't he? Same way as he did when he sold yuh a three-quarter int'rest in the Lucky Strike mine, way up in San Berdoo County. Minin' deals! He's a great little ol' minin' man is Bradley Armstrong! An' then you an' he sets to work an' buys another wedge uh land the other side uh San Nicolas. Yuh got the bad half, didn't yuh? Yuh know that now, don't yuh? Yet he made out yuh chose the best of it, hey? He'll unload any mortal thing he lays his claws on, an' unload in the best ways. Say, yuh gotter be up mortal early in the mornin' to get the better uh Bradley, an' even then it ain't no good, as most like he ain't been in bed all night so's to be ready fer yuh. Bradley's in with a bunch down in San Diego, hand an' glove. They're crooks, so's he. That land? Yuh helped to share the expense uh buyin' it, then he sold his half, an' yours—well, it's thar still, ain't it? Raisin' crops uh rattlers an' lizards an' alkali. Won't even grow sage brush. That's about all the property yuh got a clear title to now in the world.

"Now listen, Dan! An' pay pertic'ler attention an' don't ask me how I found out. I ain't lived seventy years without knowin' which hand to use when I put my knife into my mouth. But you'd like to know why the bank wouldn't renew, wouldn't yuh? After havin' promised, hey? Well

Digitized by Google

then, it was because uh Bradley. Old man Robertson's scairt uh his life uh Bradley. He ses foreclose, an' the bank 'ull foreclose.

"Why's that? Ask how much stock he's boughten the last two months, an' you'll see.

"But—an' here's the p'int, son—it ain't all in his name—yet. Why? Because he don't want people to know. Lemme tell yuh, Dan, thar's a heap uh things goin' on what yuh ain't wise to. An' the sooner yuh larn that Bradley Armstrong's got it in fer you, the better. Well I guess that's about all, an' I ain't done so much talkin' since the Fourth uh July ten years ago when Charlie Sadler come in from the desert an' got full an' shot the town marshal. Say, have I ever told yuh about that, Dan? Or was you here at the time? Charlie come in from the desert—it *was* desert in them days—with a thirst on him like——"

DAN, stunned by what he had heard, yet clinging stubbornly to the memory of what had never been, was on his feet. Suspicions, loyally stifled, came back to him.

"Mr. Morrison, there's just one thing. One thing only. Why should Bradley be doin' all these things, hey? What've I done to him? I can't—I can't believe it. An' yet—I dunno'. There must be reasons, mustn't there? How've I hurt Bradley? He's everything an' I've nothin'."

"Dan," said Mr. Morrison. "Look-a here! Yuh always was simple. I've told yuh what yuh oughter have seen fer yerself. You'd like to disbelieve it, wouldn't yuh? But yuh can't. An' see here! Whatever you do, don't be in too much of a hurry! Bradley's the best liked man in San Nicolas, an' you—you ain't.

"What's more, in this oil deal you've the whole bunch dead ag'in' yuh. An' it's not only them what have lost money, but them that never had a penny to lose. That's partly your own fault. Yuh never was a mixer, Dan. An' if yuh come to think of it, yuh ain't anyways better'n the other boys round here, are yuh? Yuh did yerself more harm than yuh knew that time yuh licked Ed Williams. Deserved it? Uh course he deserved it. All the same, if you'd let him say he was sorry, yuh wouldn't 'uv had him an' his brothers an' their friends everlastin'ly knockin' yuh. They don't forgit, them Williamses. They're from Kentucky. Tormentin' a colt, was he? I know that well enough. But it didn't do the colt no harm, an' your gittin' in an' beatin' Ed up did.

"An' so it goes. Yuh ain't gotten tact enough, Dan, fer a four-year-old kid goin' to school fer the first time. Thar's only one thing fer yuh to do an' that's to give Bradley up right now. Don't have nothin' more to do with him. He'll overreach himself soon enough fer folks to see that yuh ain't to blame—that he's the crook, not you. But don't argue. Don't start quarrelin'. An' don't—whatever yuh do—don't be fool enough to git into no gun-play. He's a crook all right all the time, but he's a million times cleverer'n you. You give him up or, by gum, not one cent do yuh git out uh me."

Dan made a helpless little gesture with his hands.

"But—but why? What's it all mean? Yuh ain't told me. What've I ever done to Bradley?"

MR. MORRISON looked at him with pity.

"Dan, yuh never will see more'n three inches away from your face, will yuh?"

He removed his chew of tobacco and laid it on the rock by his side.

"Dan, yuh want to know what Bradley had ag'in' yuh, do yuh? Well thar's one or two little things what Bradley 'ull never forgit. Remember that sorrel pony that George Harris had, that no one had ever rode? Well yuh rode it, didn't yuh? An' Bradley come up an' allowed if you could ride it he could. Remember? Well, he couldn't. He pulled leather, an' even that didn't save him. He was throwed over the pony's head, wasn't he? Well, that's one uh the things he never forgive yuh fer!"

"An' yuh mean to say Bradley Armstrong, who can do what *he* does, would let that little thing weigh fer one instant with him! I rode a bronco one day an' he couldn't! Is he goin' to keep that against me? Why—why I don't believe it!"

"All right, Dan. Yuh believe it or not. It's the truth. An' then—well then thar was that time when that greaser Joe Gonzales, or whatever his name was, the smuggler, shot Martin Haliday down by the line an' took to the hills. Remember how we all were out after him—sheriff's posse—immigration officers—everyone! Well who

Digitized by Google

got him? You did. An' Bradley was madder'n a wet hen. Why? Because you'd done what he didn't."

"But," said Dan, "that's two small things. An'—an'—that's ridiculous, Mr. Morrison. Look at what he *can* do! You yourself say I ain't a quarter as clever as what he is, an'—shucks! A man like Bradley ain't goin' to make an enemy of a man just because uh that, is he?"

Mr. Morrison sighed as one whose patience is exhausted.

"Dan, you're awful dense. He's jealous because uh those two things. Yuh made him small. Yuh won't see sense, will yuh? That's just what a man like Bradley will do. But if—" he gazed at Dan out of the corners of his eyes—"if yuh want another reason, thar is one—a very big reason. Yuh have what Bradley hasn't. An' you're losin' something that's more precious to you than anything else in the world, the most precious thing yuh have. Think hard fer once in yer life! It's not prejudice, Dan. I've seen too many men to have any prejudices left. It's jist horse-sense — observation. When I was young an' this was frontier country I larnt to use my eyes, that's all."

He shuffled one foot in the dust and yawned.

"Gee! I'm tired. If I stop talkin' to you all day I won't reach San Nicolas till evenin'. When I come in yesterday I thought I'd done all I had to do fer a month, but this mornin' I heard that some freight I ordered had come up missin', so I just made up my mind I'd go down myself an' see what was wrong."

Dan nodded without speaking, his thoughts wandering.

"An'," continued Mr. Morrison climbing into the buckboard, "an' Dan, I'll let yuh have money enough to pay off that mortgage. I'll take yer note fer it. You're Tom Cleghorn's son even if you are a fool. But see here, one thing, yuh got to drop Bradley Armstrong an' tryin' to make a fortune. You ain't cut out fer it. Thar's money enough in ranchin' if yuh go to work properly. See? Mines! What the blazes do yuh want with mines? Hey! You! You're a rancher. I'll give yuh the money, an' between us, very slow an' quiet, we'll straighten things up. I've no use fer that Bradley. None at all! An' Dan, you go slow. Very slow. See? An' larn to use them eyes uh yours. Near home, Dan. Near home."

He bit off another chew of tobacco.

"I asked yuh if yuh chewed, didn't I? You oughter, Dan. It's a powerful help to the imagination. I dunno' whar I'd 'uv been without it. You're goin' back to San Nicolas, ain't yuh? We-ell, you'd better be pushin' off. Your pony 'ull cover the ground faster'n the old horse uh mine, an' I guess you're in more of a hurry than I am anyways. Besides I don't want yuh alongside worryin' an' tryin' to thank me. Go on, Dan, you beat it home!"

CHAPTER VII

THE RETURN TO THE RANCH-HOUSE

AS DAN neared the ranch, the vague foreboding of evil that had been with him since the night before grew more real. Fear of disaster followed hard at his horse's hoofs.

His troubles were ended, he knew; the chains that had bound him were broken. And yet what was he going to lose that was more precious than anything in the world? Why had old man Morrison said that?

Surely he had not meant Eileen!

Lose Eileen? How?

It seemed as if an icy hand had clutched Dan's heart.

Could he keep her? Perhaps even now she would hold to her promise and leave him! Nor could he blame her? The fault was his. But might he not win back her love? He wanted to tell her all that had happened, to say he was sorry, to ask for forgiveness.

And Bradley!

What part had *he* played? Bradley, his friend, was a friend no longer. Bradley, as he had thought him, had never been. But why?

Bending forward in the saddle, shouting encouragement, swearing, using his quirt at times, he urged his pony down the long slope that led to the valley. In a swirl of dust and stones they slid over the high bank on to the road.

"Good boy!" said Dan. "Good boy! Gid-dup, yuh beast! Gid-dup!"

Dennis, the engineer, seated with another man under the shade of a manzanita, rose to his feet.

"Hey! Yuh crook! I been waitin' to see yuh. Why don't yuh——"

Dan swung his quirt and struck at him as he passed.

Digitized by Google

"Lookin' fer trouble, ain't yuh?"

And he thundered on, his brain a tumult of mingled hopes and fears.

THE ranch-house with its creeping vines was very still and silent in the afternoon sunshine. Vainly he hoped that he might catch some glimpse of Eileen. Then terror gripped him. Perhaps she had already gone.

He slowed down when he reached the derrick and walked his pony up the trail to the house. In the sand were fresh hoof-marks. He wondered at this. He wondered still more when he saw tied to the hitching-post at the back of the barn a brown horse.

A curious feeling of anger took the place of fear. Dismounting, he pulled the reins over the pony's head and walked quietly over the sand toward the back porch.

The low murmur of voices came to him faintly from the parlor. Very quietly he pushed open the screen-door and entered the kitchen. For some moments he stood by the table, scarcely breathing, straining his ears to catch the slightest sound.

At last when the suspense was well nigh unendurable a man spoke very softly, and a wave of fierce jealousy swept over Dan as he realized that the man with Eileen was Bradley Armstrong.

"Eileen, yuh do know why I'm here, don't yuh?"

There was no answer, and Dan, pushing one foot before the other an inch at a time, making no noise on the bare boards, crept on tiptoe toward the door leading to the parlor.

"Eileen, why don't yuh speak to me?"

Dan shuddered and felt sick.

Bradley raised his voice.

"Eileen, girl, listen! Why pretend any longer? Eileen, your husband's ruined. Did yuh know it? Without a cent in the world! Yuh know what they're sayin' about him, don't yuh? An' Eileen, you've told me often he's changed. That he don't treat yuh right. That he don't love yuh. Sometimes, girl, I feel I want to kill him just fer that reason. He ain't worthy uh yuh, Eileen. He ain't! I just can't wait no longer, sweetheart. Eileen, don't yuh know I love yuh? Yuh do. An' yuh love me too. I know it, dear. I know. Eileen, speak to me. Say yuh love me, dear. *Do!* Don't yuh trust me?"

Swaying slightly, his pulses throbbing madly, almost stifled by the beating of his heart, Dan reached the door.

"Bradley." His wife was speaking at last, in an undertone, a whisper. And a whisper, Dan knew, was love. What else? He could read no other meaning into it.

"Bradley, why——"

The words broke off and the sound of muffled sobbing followed.

Dan peered cautiously into the front room.

Huddled over the table was Eileen, crying as if her heart would break, her face hidden in her hands. Beside her with one arm around her slim shoulders sat Bradley Armstrong, smiling. Even as Dan watched, the girl lifted her head and drew back from him. Bradley flung his arms about her and kissed her lips.

Something in Dan's brain, some tiny thread, seemed to snap. He kicked open the door and staggered into the room, reeling as if drunk.

"You!" he said hoarsely. "You—you ——"

The girl uttered a shriek. Bradley jumped to his feet, overturning his chair. Dan advanced on him, showing his teeth in a snarl of hate. With his eyes wide open in a fixed, unblinking stare, Bradley backed against the wall, his hands groping in his hip-pockets.

"You thief!" said Dan. "Oh, you precious thief!"

Crooking his hands he walked toward him, seeing as if in a mist Bradley's neck with the Adam's apple rising and falling.

"Well, Bradley, yuh yeller cur, you're goin' to fight, d'yuh know it?"

Then as he pushed past the table, chuckling to himself, he saw Bradley turn and grab from the holster the revolver that hung under the shelf—the revolver with which he himself had nearly killed Eileen.

With a shout Dan sprang at him. All the disappointment and trouble and torment of the past year added force to the clenched fist that smashed into the puffy, handsome face of the man he hated. His left hand gripped the revolver tightly. Bradley wrestled furiously, blood streaming from his mouth, striving to free himself; and Dan knew that however strong he was, Bradley was the stronger. Gradually he was being overpowered. Slowly and steadily the revolver came down until the muzzle

Digitized by Google

was on a level with his forehead. Soon Bradley would pull the trigger. He could see the color returning to his cheeks, confidence gleaming from his eyes, a smile twitching his lips.

Then Dan swung him away from the wall and rushed him to the door. With one last, convulsive effort he forced the barrel of the revolver upward, away from him. They swayed for an instant and as they fell outward through the doorway on to the veranda he wrenched fiercely at Bradley's fingers. Dimly he was conscious of a loud explosion that seemed to come from a distance and yet deafen him, of a scream of agony, of a flame and the smell of gunpowder, of a woman crying.

IN THE silence that followed Dan rose to his feet and stood staring at Bradley who lay very still and quiet with his eyes closed and the blood oozing from the dark matted hair on his forehead. His head and shoulders were on the veranda, his legs in the room. The revolver lay where it had fallen.

Dan shivered and wiped the sweat from his face. Then he turned and looked at his wife, still seated at the table, cowering away from him, her hands at her throat.

"He's dead!" she said. "Dead! Is he, Dan?"

She moaned and stretching out her arms to him broke into wild sobs.

"You!" he said. "*You!*"

Words he would have said died on his lips. He eyed her with cold scorn. This thing, dead, had been his wife's lover.

She staggered toward him crying, and he pushed her off.

"Out uh here!" he said. "Keep your hands off me, d'yuh hear?"

She dropped to her knees and clutched at him.

He laughed.

"Oh! you liar! How long's it been goin' on, hey? Don't make a——exhibition uh yourself! There's no one to see yuh, only me. It won't do no good, anyways."

Stooping, he shook her by the shoulder.

"Cut it out!"

"Dan!" she said. "Oh, Dan! Yuh don't think——"

"Shut up!" he said. "Shut up!"

He glared at her, and she hid her face in her hands.

"You beauty!" he said. "You beauty!"

A cold horror of the woman surged through his whole being. The thought of her shame was like a knife-stab in his heart. Her shame was his shame. Her honor was his honor. And the dead thing had been his friend.

"Dan," she said faintly. "Dan, Dan, don't look at me that ways. I didn't—didn't——"

A sudden weariness came over him, a reaction from what he had gone through.

"Don't talk!" he said quietly. "I want to think. You're nothing to me, an' I—I won't listen. I'm goin' away from here right now. Understand! This instant. I've killed a man an' I've got to clear out. They'll be after me if they hear."

He bent over her.

"Listen! Stop cryin' fer a minute! Yuh hear!" he snarled, and the sobs were stifled suddenly. "I'm goin'. When they come, lie. Yuh can do that, uh course. It 'ull come natural to yuh. Lie like blazes! Say anything yuh like but the truth. Say I killed him—shot him in cold blood! But if yuh value your name, give no reason. Keep your shame to yerself!"

Bradley, lying half in and half out of the small room, kept the screen-door wedged open. Dan, hearing already the *bur-r-r-r* of countless flies, lifted him on to the veranda. The door closed with a bang.

"I'm goin' now," he said. "I won't trouble yuh no more."

He turned away as a stout woman drove up in a buggy.

She saw Dan standing by the dead man and shrieked.

Dan passed her at a run.

"See after my wife, Mrs. Felton, will yuh? I just killed Bradley Armstrong, an' I think she's fainted."

And without waiting he mounted his pony and galloped off southward, bound for the border and the hills and deserts of Lower California, the refuge of many another outlaw before him.

Bradley Armstrong had been his wife's lover. Guilt had flared forth on their faces when they saw him, and in that very instant the mystery had been made clear. He knew now what he had had that Bradley wanted. He knew what had been most precious in the world to him. Bradley had planned his ruin and won over Eileen.

His pony, a wiry little beast from the cow-country, was no longer fresh and Dan,

Digitized by Google

knowing the distance that lay between him and safety, groaned. The sun already low in the west blazed on him with noontide heat. The dust rose in his nostrils and choked him. Perspiration ran in little rivulets down his forehead and into his eyes.

Chance had given him the start, but there was need for haste. He turned off from the road and followed a trail through long slopes of brush toward the distant hills.

And then, while he laughed aloud at the thought of his tarnished honor, the pony stumbled and fell and he pitched forward on to his head.

CHAPTER VIII

LYNCH LAW

DAN opened his eyes to the sound of hoarse voices. It was dusk, but as he struggled to sit up, the red glow in the sky showed him the wide circle of hills, the steep slope where he had fallen and the faces of the men who stood with their ponies around him.

"He's all right now."

Some one—he could not see who—dragged him to his feet.

"None uh your games now or you'll be sorry."

His head ached and there was a dull throbbing pain in his shoulder.

"What are we goin' to do?"

"Better tie his hands. Here, Sam, let me."

And Dan's wrists were bound with rope and he was shoved forward, until he stood face to face with Felton, lean and grim and sinister, in the center of the group.

"Well," said Felton. "Well, an' what yuh got to say fer yerself?"

Dan did not answer. Dennis the engineer grinned and struck at his face with his hat.

"Wake up, yuh doggon' murderer! Wake up an' talk to yer betters when you're asked to!"

"Cut it out, Dennis!" growled Felton. "You're gettin' too fresh by a durn' sight!" He turned to Dan. "Now see here, Dan Cleghorn, I want yuh to understand yuh gotter answer when we speak to yuh. An' sharp, too!"

"Oh fer the love uh Mike!" said one of the others. "Felton hurry! We ain't gotten all night to waste this ways."

"Now see here!" continued Felton. "Did yuh kill Bradley Armstrong?"

Dan nodded his head.

"I certainly did."

"Why?"

He pondered. To speak the truth was impossible. How could he? His wife's honor meant more to him than did life itself. Her shame must be a secret shared by no other. Every single one of the dozen or so men around him had been proud to claim Bradley's friendship, he knew, and yet he had only to tell the true story of the killing to win his freedom. And the price he would have to pay?

What would they say of him behind his back? What would they think of Eileen? His wife, and loving another man! His friend!

Felton was speaking to him.

"Answer, can't yuh? Are yuh dumb? Why did yuh kill Bradley?"

Dan gave a shrug.

"Dunno'. I killed him, that's all."

"D'yuh hear that?" said Sam Elliott. "I said so fellers. That's what it was. Killed him! Did yuh hear? Fer nawthin'!"

Felton laughed.

"Well, I might 'uv known it. You dam' murderer! Killed Bradley Armstrong fer nawthin', hey! But—" and his voice took on a sudden latent savagery—"but lemme tell yuh it wasn't fer nawthin'. This thing here, this Mr. Dan Cleghorn, killed Bradley because he hated him. Think we didn't see what was goin' on! Fellers—" he turned to the crowd— "fellers, yuh know, don't yuh? Yuh know what Bradley himself said only last week, that he was almost scairt uh Dan Cleghorn since they'd had words about that oil deal. He told Dan Cleghorn he'd played a pretty low-down game on us b'ys an' oughter be ashamed uh himself.

"An' that was the beginnin'. Yuh know what Bradley was! Take any precautions! An'—an' the next thing we know he's dead, shot through the head. Unarmed he was too. An' Dan Cleghorn's gun on the floor aside him—the big old .45! He shot him, that crook there, an' that's all he'll tell us."

"The best an' straightest man in San Nicolas, in San Diego county, gone to his death because of a crook like Dan Cleghorn. I never did see what Bradley saw in him, neither."

"Aw! yuh know what Brad was. Once a friend always a friend. He wouldn't let us say a word ag'in' Dan Cleghorn, not fer never so long. An' it near' broke his heart

Digitized by Google

when he found out we was speakin' the truth."

Dennis gave a high-pitched laugh.

"An' he thought thar was oil! So he said! I had my suspicions all along, fellers. *Oil?* A put-up job! That's what it was. An' whar did the money go to? How much has Mr. Dan Cleghorn, what's so free with his tongue an' his fists an' his quirt, gotten stowed away in the bank? Don't yuh tell me!"

"The goldarn' murderer!"

"Jealous uh the best man that ever spoke a kind word to a crook!"

BRUISED and shaken by his fall, sick at heart, and careless of the future if only he might keep his secret, Dan listened to what was said of him with a smile on his lips. Everything was like a dream, a nightmare from which he would presently awaken to find himself shivering with fear; the afterglow that bathed the hills and valley with golden light, the scent of the sage-brush, the creaking of the crickets, the full moon pale in the east, the circle of grim, wrathful faces, Bradley Armstrong lying on the veranda with the blood on his forehead, Eileen weeping because her lover had died.

Why had these things happened to him? What was the explanation? These men standing around him—Felton, lean and cruel and smiling; Sam Elliott, scowling angrily; Dennis the engineer, frankly exultant; Ed Williams, his brother Ike, Bud Stephens, biting his lips nervously; Joe Russell, Percy Webb, Harvey Matson the blacksmith; Harry Harland, Sam Bolton and Harry Clifton, cowpunchers from Warner's; Jack Hedley whose brother he had fought and thrashed for moving a fence-post—why should they all hate him? Had he not tried to deal squarely with all men? What reason had they for hounding him month after month as though he had been some criminal?

High above the whispered undertones Felton's voice asked the question that Dan was asking of himself.

"Cut it out! What are we goin' to do with him?"

"What do yuh do with a rattler when yuh come on him, hey?"

Ed Williams thrust his sneering, square-jawed face close to Dan's.

"What we goin' to do with yuh, hey, Mr. Cleghorn? You—you Judas! Killin' the man yuh pretended to like! You—you thief!"

"What do yuh call me that fer?" flared Dan, goaded into speech. "An' keep yer hands off me, Ed Williams. I don't like yuh, an' I never did."

"An' a helluva lot I care if yuh like me or not! I'm not so crazy on havin' a murderer fer a friend, believe me!"

Dan shivered.

"What are we goin' to do with him?" said Felton once more. "Take him into San Nicolas an' send word to the sheriff what's happened so's he can come an' take him to San Diego tomorrer?"

Sam Elliott drove his fist into the palm of his hand.

"What! An' let him go to trial—*him*—with all that money uh his to fight fer him? Are we fools, Felton? How many months would that trial last? How many times would he git leave to appeal? Are we to trust the man who killed Bradley Armstrong to judges an' lawyers an' legal quibblin'? Are we fools?"

There was a murmur of agreement from the crowd.

"Settle the matter out ourselves," said Ed Williams. "He's a murderer, ain't he? He's said as much himself. Well then, what do we do to murderers, hey?"

"Ed's right," said Sam Elliott. "We're all friends here. If none of us split, who's to know? B'ys that man's got to die, ain't he? What chanst have we uh justice? Thar ain't a man in the county'll blame us fer what we're doin'."

"Give over that rope uh yours, Harry! It's goin' to be used fer better game than steers this time anyways."

"Wait!" said Felton. "We gotter do this thing right. B'ys, listen to me! Is there any one here what thinks that this man don't deserve to die? Remember, he killed Bradley Armstrong in cold blood. He's said so himself. Shall we string him up or not?"

No one spoke.

"You-all think then we oughter do what the law mightn't? Shall we hang him?"

And as Dan heard the answer he laughed aloud.

"Come on, Felton, don't keep us out all night! Hang if you're goin' to hang! I killed Bradley because I wanted to, an' yuh hang me because I did. That's plain common sense. Only don't keep me waitin' more'n yuh can help."

Digitized by Google

There was a low laugh.

"He'll sing a diff'rent tune in a minute," said Dennis. "That kind always do. Wait till he feels the rope round his neck an' the ground slippin' away under his feet! The damned, murderin' hound!"

"There ain't a tree anywhere handy, is there?" said Felton.

"Yuh got yer guns ain't yuh?" said Dan.

"Not fer you," said Dennis. "Not fer p'izen like you we ain't."

"Thar ain't no tree anywhar till we come to the trail again," said Ed Williams. "Then thar's that old oak down by the bluff."

Sam Elliott waved his arms wildly above his head.

"Fellers, listen! How 'bout hangin' him from his doggon' old derrick, hey? How 'bout his derrick?"

"Right!" snapped Felton. "Better still. Git on yer hosses an' we'll take him along."

DAN shuddered as the rope was fastened around his neck. Then defiant to the last, too dazed and sick to care what happened, he forced a laugh that sounded even to himself almost real.

But when he moved off down the slope in the midst of his enemies, sitting their ponies easily and talking in whispers, he felt strangely weak and helpless. His heartbeats were like the thudding of horses' hoofs in the distance. His mouth was clammy and dry, his tongue like leather, and he would have given much for a last drink of water, which was foolish he knew. There was no quicker method of curing a thirst or a sprained ankle or a bruised shoulder than what they had in mind for him.

He wondered if they would give him time to pray. And if prayers said at the last minute before he was launched into eternity would help. He did not think so. The motive was more than the prayer. He had sinned, of course. He had killed a man that very day. Had he meant to? He was not sure. Was he sorry? Of that he had not the least doubt. He was glad. Bradley deserved to die. Which was the more to blame? He wondered. But the Almighty would judge between them and judge right. If he deserved mercy, mercy was what would be granted.

Each instant the beating of his heart grew louder and more distinct. Without thinking he turned his head to listen as if in very truth a horse was galloping toward them.

A doubt rose to his mind.

"S'sh!"

Ed Williams, the man nearest him, was jerking the rope.

"Stop, can't yuh? Felton, thar's some one comin'."

They halted to listen. Clear on the evening air came the sound of a galloping horse and wheels.

"Well I'll be——!" said Felton. "Ain't that just——"

"That's what I've been listenin' to," said Dan. "I——"

The cold muzzle of a revolver pressed against the back of his neck silenced him.

"Say another word an' you're a dead man," said Ed Williams in a hoarse whisper.

And at that Dan smiled. He always had thought Ed Williams a fool, now he was sure of it. If he had to die, what difference would it make whether he died by the rope or the bullet?

"What are we goin' to do? Hey, Felton?"

"Turn back, or——"

"Turn back nothin'! What doggon' lunatic's drivin' along this hour an' this ways?"

"Some one in a buckboard."

"Drivin' a white hoss too."

"Thar's two people, man an'—— Look, Sam! Ain't that a woman?"

"They're stoppin'. Say, that's——"

Dan's heart gave an upward leap as from the direction of the road a shout reached his ears.

"Felton! Yuh thar, Felton? What's up? What yuh fellers doin' thar, hey?"

"Who are you?"

"I'll show yuh fast enough who I am, Yuh got Dan Cleghorn up thar?"

"You go to the devil, whoever yuh are!"

"Why—why—" Sam Elliott was speaking—"why it's old man Morrison!"

"An'," said Felton, "who in thunder's that with him?"

"Felton," said Sam Elliott, "what're we goin' to do? Hey? We don't want that old mossback buttin' in."

Felton rode forward.

"Mr. Morrison, yuh must get out uh here! D'yuh understand? You're not wanted. See! An' we're not goin' to stand fer no nonsense."

Dan smiled at the old man's answer.

"Well, well, if that ain't Mr. Felton ridin' horseback! Howdy, Mr. Felton! Weather's fine, ain't it? Say, yuh seen Dan Cleghorn anywhars around lately?"

Digitized by Google

"I have," said Felton angrily. "If yuh want to know so much, I *have* seen Dan Cleghorn. Is there anything else yuh want?"

"Why, yes," said the old man mildly. "Why, yes, thar is. Here's Mrs. Cleghorn that's come with me to fetch him back home. That's her, back in the rig." He raised his voice. "Dan, here's Eileen. She wants to speak to yuh."

CHAPTER IX

EILEEN TELLS THE TRUTH

INTO the midst of the men and horses came Eileen, bareheaded, her fair hair loose over her forehead, her face pale and worn with pain and sorrow and fear. At her heels slouched old man Morrison, breathing heavily and grumbling to himself.

"Is my husband here?" she asked quietly. "I want to see him."

"He's here, Mrs. Cleghorn," said Felton. "But I oughter tell yuh once fer all that nawthin' yuh can do or say will make no diff'rence. It's no good, ma'am. I'm sorry but——"

"Dan," said the girl. She looked from one side to the other. "Dan."

"Well," said Dan roughly, stepping forward the full length of his rope. "Well, what is it? What are yuh doin' here? They don't want yuh, an' I don't neither. This is no place fer any woman. Understand?" He turned to her companion. "Say, Mr. Morrison, what did yuh bring her here fer? Can't yuh see it's no place fer a girl? Take her away!"

"Dan," said the girl sharply. "Dan, what's that rope fer? Hey? Tell me at once! What do they reckon to do with yuh?" Her voice rose ever so slightly, as if, try as she would, her fears were growing. "What is it?"

"Now, Mrs. Cleghorn," said Felton uneasily. "Now, please. Why can't yuh go off without givin' us all this trouble? It ain't right fer you to be here. It ain't, indeed.

Mr. Morrison gave a sudden, short laugh, almost a bark.

"Huh! Eileen, these gentlemen don't seem to want the honor uh yer company. Looks like you'd butted in on a party which wasn't expectin' ladies. An', fer the land's sake! What d'yuh know about this? I dunno' when I been so int'rested in y'ars! Sam, you've been here almost as long as I have, an' I guess your mem'ry's a sight spryer than mine. When was the last lynchin' party in San Nicolas? Didn't the b'ys once try an' string up a greaser fer stealin' hosses way back—why thirty y'ars ago, purty near?"

Eileen swayed as if about to fall, and Sam Elliott clutched at her.

"Now, Mrs. Cleghorn, now——"

"Don't touch me! I can't bear it. What are yuh doin' with my husband, hey? What business is it of yours to put that rope 'round his neck? Let me go this minute, yuh hear me?"

Sam held her by the wrist and she struck at him fiercely.

"Now, Mrs. Cleghorn, yuh mustn't——"

"Dan," she said, "Danny, I can't——"

She broke into a storm of sobs, and Sam, as if frightened, loosed his grip.

"Mr. Morrison," said Dan hoarsely, "why can't yuh take her home?" He raised his bound hands and shoved her away from him gently. "Please take her away, some one?"

He felt sick at heart, filled with a wild hate for the woman who stood before him weeping softly, and the men who watched her.

She turned from him and faced Felton.

"An' you—you're the man who's goin' to hang my husband, hey? Why?"

Felton cleared his throat and pulled at his long moustache. Dan, eying him closely, smiled.

"Because—because he—he killed Bradley Armstrong. That's why, Mrs. Cleghorn. I'm sorry." He ended lamely.

Dan laughed.

"That's right, Felton. I killed Bradley. An' now will some one have the goodness to take that woman away from here where she's no right to be?"

"Who in —— are yuh callin' a woman?" said Ed Williams.

"He killed Bradley Armstrong," continued Felton, "an' that's why we're here."

"You ain't goin' to do no lynchin' now, anyways," said Mr. Morrison, thrusting his hands into his pockets and gazing around the circle. "Not by a durn' sight yuh ain't!"

"The —— we ain't!" said Dennis. "Why not, hey?"

"That's it," said Sam Elliott. "Why not, hey? Who's to stop us? This thug he goes

Digitized by Google

an' shoots down the best man in San Nicolas, the very best, a pal uh his, in cold blood, an unarmed man, fer no reason at all except that Bradley was a better man than him an' he knew it. He did all he could to help him, Brad did, stood up fer him, never let any one say a word ag'in' him, not fer months after we all knew what happened, an' in return when most like he told him the truth he ups and shoots him. The durn' murderer! Bradley told us often he was scared uh him, that he'd——"

The girl gave a little cry and held out her arms.

"Dan," she moaned. "Oh, Dan! Did yuh tell them that?"

And Dan, hating her more than he had ever imagined a man could hate a woman, nodded coldly and looked past her at Felton.

"Dan," she went on, "why won't yuh speak to me?"

"Eileen," said Mr. Morrison. "Eileen, it won't do no good takin' on that-a ways!"

"Listen to me," said the girl wildly. "Mr. Felton," she turned to the tall, lean man behind her. "Mr. Felton, that ain't true what's just been said. You know——"

"Shut up!" growled Dan. "Don't yuh dare say a word! It's none uh your business! Yuh done mischief enough today without makin' it wofse'n it is."

"Cut it out!" said Ed Williams. "What are yuh talkin' like that fer?"

Felton was whispering to Sam Elliott and Joe Russell, the two oldest men of the party. He turned to the girl.

"Go on, Mrs. Cleghorn, then. I warn yuh, though, it won't do no good all the same. What is it?"

SHE raised her hand and smoothed the heavy strand of hair from off her forehead, her eyes dazed with suffering gazed steadily at Dan as if seeking an answer to some unasked question, her lips quivered, the shirt open at the neck showed the rise and fall of her bosom. And Dan felt a sudden pity within him. Who, seeing her for the first time, could have believed that she had sinned as she had!

"Mr. Felton," she said, "yuh don't understand——"

"Will you shut up?" said Dan. "Can't yuh stop her, Mr. Morrison? My God, man, don't yuh see that I mean it? I don't *want* her to speak? Git her out of this right now! Oh, fer God's sake!"

He struggled to free himself, but a sharp jerk at the rope brought him back.

"You'll be gittin' yerself hurt in a minute," said Ed Williams. "You let the little lady say what she wants to say."

"Listen," said the girl. "My husband shot Bradley Armstrong, I know. You know it too. I told yuh, Sam Elliott, when yuh came to the house after Dan had went off. Yuh know that, don't yuh? An' Bradley hadn't a gun, hey? So yuh think. He had, all the same. He'd Dan's gun. He took it out uh the scabbard that hung on the wall an' he tried to shoot Dan first. They fought, Dan with his bare hands, Bradley with the gun.

"An' then—then, they fell through the door on to the veranda, I saw them, an'—somehow the gun went off, an' when next I looked Bradley was dead an' Dan was standin' over him. I swear before God that it's the truth! Yuh can't hang him fer that! Yuh can't! Bradley did his best to kill Dan, an' the muzzle was pointin' at his own head when he pulled the trigger. Yuh can't hang him fer that, Mr. Felton. Yuh can't."

"Uh course they can't!" said Mr. Morrison in a deep voice. "They ain't a-goin' to, neither. Go on with yer story, Eileen, I'm consid'rable int'rested."

"Yes," said Felton with slow anger. "Yes, that's all very well. We've your word fer it, Mrs. Cleghorn, an' that's all. But what we want to know is, why *should* they have fought? Why should Bradley Armstrong, the best feller that ever walked, have tried to shoot your husband? Bradley had no quarrel with Dan, had he?"

"None at all," said Sam Elliott. We ain't fools, Mrs. Cleghorn. Why not speak the truth? Yer husband tried fer to kill Bradley because Bradley had told him what he thought of him an' his crooked ways. Ain't that it?"

"Yes, Sam Elliott, that's what happened," put in Dan. "I tried to kill Bradley because of a row we had over what I done in that oil deal. That's the truth. An' now—" he glared at his wife—"will yuh shut up?"

"Mr. Felton," said the girl, "Mr. Felton, that ain't the truth, an' Dan knows it. It's a pack uh lies."

"How do we know yuh ain't both in it?"

Digitized by Google

said Dennis. "It's a doggon' frame-up that's what it is!"

"Dennis," said Felton sharply, "if I hear you shootin' off your mouth again that ways, you'll be sorry yuh spoke. Now keep quiet—the whole crowd uh yuh!"

"Felton," said Mr. Morrison, "if I were yuh I'd choose my friends more careful. They ain't a pertickler amiable bunch, any uh them!" He coughed. "Now Eileen, say what's worryin' yuh! Everything. It's gittin' chilly."

The girl shivered.

"Dan, don't look at me that ways! Dan dear, yuh don't mind, do yuh? Mr. Felton, it was on my account my husband killed Bradley!"

She covered her face with her hands.

Dan gave a hoarse cry of rage.

"You—you——"

A wild madness swept over him and once more he struggled fiercely to free himself from his rope.

"If yuh don't quit that right now," said Ed Williams, "you'll hang yerself before we gits to the derrick."

He tugged at the lariat, and Dan choked as the pressure tightened about his windpipe. He could hardly breathe. Everything went black before his eyes. And then the noose was slackened and he heard a voice in his ear;

"Cut it out! Yuh hear! Cut it out right now!"

His wife, silent for a moment, was speaking once more.

"Dan dear, I must. I have to. An' yuh don't understand! Yuh don't!"

SHE GAVE a little groan and stood with his head drooping. He had done all in his power to stop her. She would tell shamelessly what had happened; that she had been unfaithful to him, her husband; that he had found her in her lover's arms.

"If yuh love me, if yuh ever did love me, keep quiet now," he muttered.

The tears were streaming down her cheeks as she pleaded for his life, the life which had he been able he would have sacrificed a hundred times over to keep her lips closed. The men watched her in silence. Mr. Morrison bit off a piece of tobacco, to all appearance uninterested in what she said. A breeze sprang up and rustled the leaves of the mesquite. A screech-owl hooted mournfully.

"Dan killed him, I know. But he fought him with his bare hands. It was Bradley had the gun. Dan found us together. He come back, Dan did, unexpected, an' we was in the parlor together, Bradley Armstrong an' me. Bradley rode over, he said, to see me. He wanted to talk things over. *You!* You all thought Dan made money in that oil deal, didn't yuh? He didn't. He's ruined. Every penny he had went into it to try an' get back something fer them that trusted him. He could 'uv paid off his mortgage three times over if he hadn't put all his money into sinkin' the well.

"Ask at the bank if yuh want to know! They told him yesterday they'd have to foreclose. An' who knew it? No one but Bradley. An' *he*—Bradley—said he was sorry! He couldn't help, though, 'cause all his money was tied up, but he told Dan he'd see that I, Dan's wife, didn't starve. Yes Bradley was goin' to see that I didn't starve. Dan was goin' to leave San Nicolas to go work fer wages, an' I was to stay an' live in one uh Bradley's cottages, rent free, an' maybe get work in the post-office. That was the reason he come over to talk with me this afternoon."

She paused for breath and then continued in the same toneless voice.

"An' I asked him in, uh course. Bein' a friend uh Dan's, his only one, I asked him in. Why not? Dan would 'uv been the first to say I oughter have done. I did. An' Bradley he sat by my side an' said he was sorry about my husband bein' hard up, but I wasn't to worry an' that I'd be all right an' so on. An' then, Mr. Felton, then before I knew quite what was happ'nin', an' maybe I ain't as bright as I oughter be, he was sayin' things no woman oughter hear from any man but her husband. He was askin' me, Dan Cleghorn's wife, to be unfaithful to my husband, to break my marriage vows. Bradley Armstrong that was a man I'd 'uv trusted like a brother! My husband's friend! An' then I felt like I was goin' off an' I was cryin' an' he put his arms 'round me an' kissed me. An' then—then I heard something an' Dan was at the kitchen-door lookin' at us. That's the truth! They fought then, an' Bradley tried to kill Dan. That's all!"

FOR the space of perhaps three deep breaths no one spoke, and then Felton strode over to where Dan

Digitized by Google

was standing close by Ed Williams's pony.

"Is this true?" he said sternly. "That part about Bradley kissin' your wife an' sayin' things!"

"Oh! God knows!" said Dan. "I s'pose so."

He did not care now what happened. That he would probably escape seemed of small importance.

"Is this true?" wailed the girl. "What else would he have fought him fer? Bradley was crooked. We were blind, both of us. I never saw through him till the very end. I liked him and trusted him. I wanted Dan to be like he was. But I didn't know—how could I—what he was really like. An' Dan —Dan thought I——"

The tears choked her and she could not finish.

"Mrs. Cleghorn," said Felton presently. "How do we know that what you're sayin' is true?"

"Have yuh any evidence?" asked Elliott. "It's easy enough to say things like that, but it's a durn' sight harder to prove 'em."

"Evidence!" said the girl. "What evidence? What d'yuh mean? How are yuh to know I'm speakin' the truth, is that it? Am I a liar, then? Yuh don't believe me, uh course. Yuh wouldn't. Evidence?"

She thrust her hand into the pocket of her riding-skirt and pulled out a soiled and crumpled envelope that showed white in the darkness.

"There's this. I got it a month ago. From Bradley. An'—I didn't understand it. Not then. I kept it—more fer curiosity than any other reason. Yuh know Bradley's way uh joshin', don't yuh? I didn't, Mr. Felton, I didn't dream that what was written in this letter was meant. Not till I felt his arms 'round me this afternoon! An' mind, he never mentioned this—not by so much as a word! An' no more did I. Foolish, p'r'aps! Maybe I was. All the same, I thought it was only written just kind uh to comfort me. An'—if yuh don't see what the first part meant—well Dan an' me was havin' a few words just about then which ain't nothin' to do with any one else but us two."

Felton took the paper that she handed him.

"Read it aloud!" said a voice. "Let's all hear it."

He read:

DEAR GIRL: If you are ever in trouble, as yuh must be, remember yuh can trust in me. I will help whenever help is needed. Surely our friendship means this and more than this. You can not face the world alone, Eileen, and I am ready to help.

Your affectionate Bradley

P. S.—Some do not see the value of what they have. A man may have eyes and yet be blind. Things ain't going to go on as they are much longer. B.

Felton's thin fingers played around his chin. He looked at the girl.

"Yeh, Mrs. Cleghorn. This cert'nly seems all right. It—it helps, anyways. Dated August first. Bradley's writin', too."

"I kept it," said the girl. "But I never knew, not till today, what he meant. I thought he was off'rin' me sympathy. Sympathy, an' nothin' else but sympathy. I didn't speak to him about it because I knew he'd no right to think I wasn't happy with Dan. An' that's the truth. In that letter yuh can see that I've told yuh the truth."

"Maybe we can see something more in the letter," said Sam Elliott dryly.

Dan swallowed a lump in his throat and groaned.

"I was with Bradley this mornin' when Dan come up an' said he wouldn't be back home till tomorrer, so that Bradley mightn't go up to the house an' find him away. Whether he meant it or not, seein' he was home a few hours later, I don't know. But it looks mighty like a put-up job. Mighty like. Mrs. Cleghorn, maybe yuh ain't realized it, but that letter proves more'n you think fer! How are we to know Bradley hadn't been yer lover fer—months? Or since the day he wrote that letter, hey? How do we know yer husband didn't know it? Or suspect it?"

"If I was a younger man'n I am, Sam Elliott," said Mr. Morrison, "I'd make yuh eat them words. Yuh low-minded skunk! I've seen rattlers I'd a durn' sight sooner be friends with than you. I have."

Eileen was staring at Sam with her hands by her sides and her head held very erect.

"An' yuh believe it!" she said. "Yuh believe *that?* Do yuh think I'd be here sayin' what I have said if Bradley Armstrong had been anything more to me than something to be hated? I did hate him. I'm glad he's dead. He tried to steal me an' he failed. Would I be here if I'd been faithless to Dan? I would not, an' yuh ought to know it. Yuh

Digitized by Google

don't believe me, hey? I knew I'd lay myself open to suspicion when I began. I don't care. I'm speakin' the truth. Some uh yuh believe me, don't yuh? You, Mr. Felton! You do, don't yuh?"

"It don't matter, anyways," said Felton. "You've—you've shown us why yer husband had cause to hate Bradley. To kill him, too. An' that's all——"

"But it does matter," said the girl quickly. "It does. There's Dan that I've got to think of. It's him I'm fightin' fer. I've cleared Dan, which I came here to do. Will that help me if I've proved myself guilty? I've my own honor to think of as well as Dan's life. One's no good without the other. Yuh never thought uh that, did yuh? It means nothin' to me to stand up this ways an' talk, does it?"

SHE paused, white and scornful and aloof, as if waiting for an answer to her question. None came, and she made a weary little gesture of contempt and spoke once more.

"Listen! If I'd loved Bradley I'd have hated Dan. Would I have tried to save him if he'd killed the man I loved? I would not. If I'd done what yuh said, would I have said one word? An' that's why I come after Dan. He'd 'uv been hanged before he'd 'uv spoken one word. I wanted to save him an' save myself. To prove to him that I didn't do what he thinks I did.

"Bradley was not my lover. A friend—yes—but a friend ain't a lover. An' Dan liked him. How was I to know he was crooked? That he was plannin' an' plottin' to get me! He was clever, Bradley was, an' I ain't. Not till today did I know what I ought to have seen months ago. Dan found him kissin' me an' they fought. He didn't mean to kill him, but if he had— is there one man among you here who wouldn't have done the same? No, there ain't! Not one uh yuh! An' now that's the truth. An'—an' I'll ask yuh to let Dan go."

Felton nodded.

"Ed, loosen up that rope, will yuh? An' untie his hands some one. It's all right, Mrs. Cleghorn, we'll let him go fer your sake."

WITH the same feeling that he was living in a dream from which he must soon awaken, Dan stepped forward, a free man once more. There would be certain formalities, of course, but in the eyes of at least twelve of his fellow men the killing of Bradley Armstrong had been justified. The future could take care of itself.

"You'll have the sheriff after yuh tomorrer, I guess," said Felton. "But that shouldn't worry yuh any. There's evidence in plenty to save yuh now. Though—though things looked mighty black a whiles back, I must say. We didn't like yuh, Dan Cleghorn, yuh know that as well as I do, but we'll see that yuh git justice. Whatever yuh done in the matter uh that oil deal, we-ell—that's got nawthin' to do with Bradley. But it's Mrs. Cleghorn saved you. Most like by now you'd 'uv been kickin' in the bight uh that rope."

Dan stared at him moodily but did not speak.

And then old man Morrison's raucous laugh broke the stillness.

"So the oil's got nawthin' to do with Bradley, ain't it? Yuh wait then an' you'll see whether it has or it hasn't. Pack uh fools! That's what yuh are. An' Dan's as bad as the rest uh yuh. Who do yuh think was the crook, Bradley Armstrong as successful as any man 'round here or Dan Cleghorn with the brains of a peanut an' not a cent left to his name? That's enough, Sam Elliott! I'm supposed to be addressin' my remarks to intelligent men, not to boneheads like you. So shut up! Or maybe yuh want me to remind yuh of something that happened that day up at Silver's when—all right then, drop it! What I was goin' to say when that toad interrupted me was that thar weren't no crook but Bradley. Bradley Armstrong just naturally set himself out to ruin Dan."

"An' what proof 'uv yuh gotten to——"

"Mr. Felton you've done a consid'rable amount uh talkin' tonight, most of it unnecessary. I'd be obliged if you'd let *me* say a few words now. I'll let yuh have all the proofs yuh want at the right time. But fer the time bein' yuh must take my word fer what I'm tellin' yuh. Bradley ruined Dan deliberate, planned his ruin systematic, months ahead, just fer one thing. He hated Dan anyways, but he wanted Dan's wife. That's the truth! An' more fool me! I didn't see till it was almost too late.

"An'—look-a here. You-all keep sayin' that Dan stole yer money what yuh put in

Digitized by Google

to that oil proposition uh his. Did he? I suppose Bradley told yuh! Bradley helped buy that rough-neck Dennis. Dennis, how long yuh been out uh San Quentin? Or was it Folsom? You're a pretty good specimen of a jail-bird, ain't yuh? An' that's enough from you anyways. When I see a man like Dennis I know whar to place him.

"Lemme tell yuh b'ys Dan ain't made a cent out uh the oil. What's more, he put money he oughter have used to pay off his mortgage into it an' dropped every cent. An' yesterday the bank foreclosed same as Eileen said, an' after they'd promised him a second mortgage! Looks queer, don't it? Dan's not gotten a cent left. That looks like makin' a fortune, don't it? An' why didn't the bank do as they said? *Bradley didn't want 'em to!*

"Old Robertson' durs'en't go ag'in' what Bradley said. An' why? 'Cause Bradley was aimin' at gettin' the controllin' int'rest in the bank. He'd everything fixed that ways too. Thar's other things I'll tell yuh some other time, at the trial maybe. How Bradley got Dan int'rested in oil in the first place, how he unloaded a gold-mine on him, an' land an' so on. But I think now we'd better be movin'. I guess Mrs. Cleghorn's 'most as tired as I am."

"Yuh done with me, Mr. Felton?" asked Dan.

Felton nodded.

"Yeh, we done with yuh, Dan."

He put his foot into the stirrup and mounted his pony.

"Come on, b'ys, it's late an' we'll be pushin' home."

He turned in his saddle and took off his hat.

"Mrs. Cleghorn, I'd like to say—to say that I think Dan's lucky in havin' you fer a wife. Good night!"

THE last of the afterglow had long faded from the sky, the short Californian twilight had given way to night. Moonlight flooded the hills and valleys.

Dan watched the horses moving off down the slope until they were lost in the greasewood and mesquite and manzanita. He did not stir. The thought that he was still in the grip of the dream clung to him. And what of the awakening? Gradually, almost imperceptibly, it came over him that they—the men who had wanted to hang him—were gone.

"Dan." It was old man Morrison speaking. "Dan, I'm goin'. Wake up, son! You're half asleep. Yuh ain't hurt, are yuh? No! All right then, I'll leave yuh. Dan, I'll stay in San Nicolas fer the night. I'll see yuh in the mornin'. I was goin' to give yuh a ride in the buckboard, yuh an' Eileen, but—but I guess I won't. You'd better walk. It ain't far to the ranch from here. So long, then. Goodby, Eileen."

The old man walked slowly away. Dan stared blindly at the girl. After a time he raised his hand to his throat as if choking.

"I'm goin'—goin' home," he said. He turned and moved off through the brush, limping slightly, and holding one arm at the elbow to ease the pain in his shoulder.

As for Eileen, she could follow after him if she wanted to. It would make no difference—either way. Not after what had happened!

CHAPTER X

THE END

"DAN!"

Faint as the sighing of the wind the girl's voice came to him across the greasewood. He limped wearily on, his eyes fixed on the distant mountains pearl gray in the light of the moon.

"Dan!"

He growled and shook his head. She was calling him. For what? Why should he trouble himself with *her?* She was nothing to him.

"Dan! I wish you'd wait fer me. I'm so—" the voice broke in a sob—"so tired!"

Unbidden, a lump rose to Dan's throat. But not for all the money in the world would he have turned. She was nothing to him. Not even a wife. Had he possessed the strength he would have quickened his pace and left her. But even to walk at all made him wince with pain. He was thirsty and tired and very sick. He wanted to sleep and forget and never waken.

She had saved his life, he knew, but she had in so doing revealed what should never have been told. And before his enemies! Had she spoken the truth? Or had she lied? But for Bradley's letter he might have had faith in her story. Now how could he? How was he to know what answer she had given? Might she not have been false to him for months on end? She said not. He

Digitized by Google

had her word. And nothing more. Was that word sufficient after what he had seen with his own eyes? And Felton, Elliott, Williams, Stephens, and the others, men he hated, would they believe in her?

Clumsily he probed the innermost recesses of his tired mind.

They did believe in her of course. Otherwise would they have let him go? But was her innocence proved by that? They did not know her as he did. They did not know that she no longer loved him.

She had risked everything for his sake, everything that a woman holds most dear. Was that to make no difference?

Would she have said what she had said or done what she had done if she had not been true to him?

Very slowly, his knees sagging under the weight of his body, his shoulders bent, his head drooping, he reached the brow of the hill and halted. Beneath him lay the ranch —his home—where Bradley had been killed. His thoughts wandered unchecked.

Suddenly he shivered as if the breeze that blew in hot gusts from the desert over the range of hills to the east had turned a bitter cold.

He was going home. And what was home to him? What would he find there but emptiness and desolation? Bare, untidy rooms full of memories of what had been and would never be again. The parlor, with the sewing-basket on the bureau, and the books and the table where she had sat and watched him as he entered from the kitchen. The kitchen with the dishes arranged neatly on the dresser and the pans shining like silver and the bread mixed for baking under the cheesecloth; the bedroom with the rows of dresses hanging in the big cupboard, and the bowl of roses on the chest of drawers and the hair-brushes and bits of ribbon and lace, and the faint, sweet scent of lavender over everything.

And then Dan turned and limped back along the trail, forgetting his pain and weariness in the knowledge that had come to him.

Leaning against a tall granite boulder, her face hidden in her hands, was Eileen.

"EILEEN!" he said as he drew near to her.

"Eileen!"

She did not move.

He touched her on the shoulder very gently—

"Eileen, what is it?"

The hands were lowered and she stared at him almost as if she saw a stranger or one whom she had not met for many long and weary years. Her lips quivered.

"Dan!" she whispered.

"Eileen, you're not angry with me, are yuh? Eileen, girl, please! Don't look at me that way! Are you hurt, Eileen?"

"It's not—not Dan, is it?" she asked.

Her face was very close to his; in her brown eyes were tears that shone like diamonds in the moonlight; a strand of golden hair brushed against his cheek.

"Eileen," he said, "I'm sorry. I didn't know. An' yuh ain't angry with me now, Eileen, are yuh?"

"Angry!" she said wistfully. "Angry, Dan! Why Dan—yuh mustn't. Not that Dan. It was my fault. All of it. I was mean to yuh, Dan. When yuh were worryin' I never helped yuh. I believed—I did, Dan, fer a time—I believed what folks were sayin'. It hurt, Dan, awful. An' yuh were cold to me.

"Now I know what yuh must have been sufferin', an' I understand what I didn't then. How yuh were cheated an' made to take the blame uh what others had done. An' that money—Dan, yuh don't think fer one minute I care fer that, do yuh? But I was mean to yuh, Dan, an' I tried to hurt yuh. I did. I know now what I didn't know then, an' I'm sorry. I thought yuh hated me."

Dan caught his breath with a sob.

"Eileen, listen! I want to speak to yuh. Dear, I never knew till now what yuh really are to me. How much I want yuh."

The words that old man Morrison had used that morning—years ago—came back to him.

"Eileen! You're the most precious thing in the world. Life ain't worth livin' without yuh. An' yet—yet even after yuh told them fellers what happened, when yuh risked your name an' everything else fer my sake —even then I didn't understand. I was angry, Eileen. I—oh, I dunno'! Seems like I was crazy."

He broke off, choking. A great tenderness and longing swept over him. The thought of how she had fought for him, for his life no less than for her own honor, face to face with men who were ready to laugh her to scorn, filled him with an infinite com-

Digitized by Google

passion. Her love had been greater than his. Could he have done what she had done? This girl!

He stood with his head bowed, waiting for her to speak.

"Eileen, can yuh fergive me?"

"Fergive!" she whispered. "Why, Dan——"

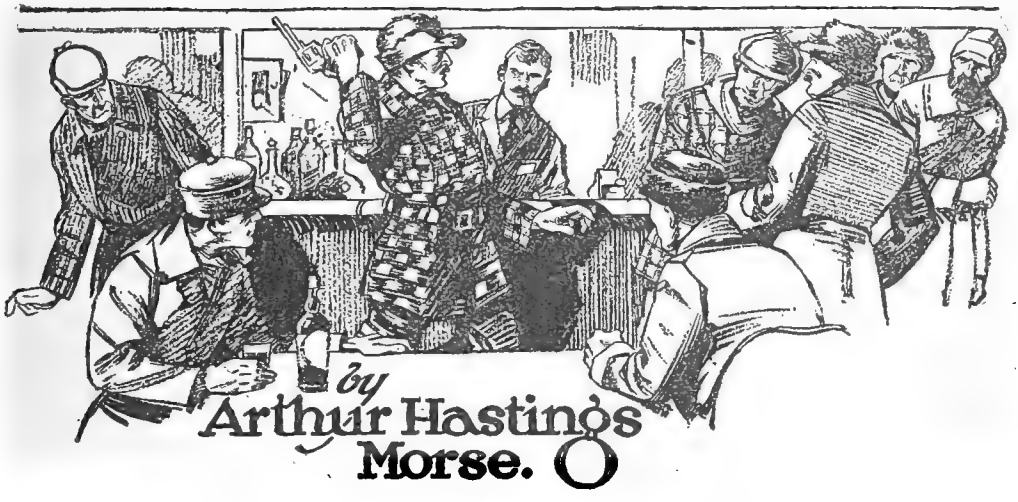
She placed her small hand over his mouth.

"Don't, Dan, it hurts. Not that dear. Please!"

She began to cry very quietly.

And knowing she loved him, he held her tight in his arms and soothed her as if she had been some tired child.

The Return of Wolf McInnis.



by Arthur Hastings Morse.

A CLUSTER of shimmering lights, red, white and yellow, welcomed Wolf McInnis as, with a last sharp crack of his rawhide whip, he mushed into Kaltag.

His huskies, their tongues hanging athwart their mouths, strained at the traces and quickened their pace. The dumb animals knew that rest and food were near and were as eager to attain them as their master. Wolf, dog-tired, clutched the gee-pole with his great, work-calloused hands, and snapped his jaw shut with a click.

At an intersection of two small so-called streets, where the snow was piled high around dilapidated shacks, Wolf McInnis halted and cast furtive, sidelong glances for a possible glimpse of one of the few inhabitants of that irreverent community. Seeing none he went on toward his shack, wondering at the extreme quietude. As he came near his humble dwelling he caught a faint glitter of light that gleamed through a frost-blurred window-pane.

He rapped sharply with the butt of his thong whip, and his breed wife opened the door, greeting him with a long face. The unaccustomed sulkiness of her demeanor presaged, to Wolf, a recent happening of some unusual import. Putting two and two together he wondered at the absence of the tainted frivolity and gaiety that usually reigned supreme at night at Kaltag.

"What's wrong?" he queried grumpily, removing his outer furs and chafing his numbed hands before the smoldering coals. "What's wrong, I say? What's come over you and this pastoral village? Where's all the life tonight?"

The comely little breed girl appeared frightened, and her large black eyes lacked their former luster. She did not answer.

"Well, ain't you going to feed the huskies? What's come over you, anyway? You look scar't. Any one croaked around here? Whose funeral is it?"

A mist crept into the girl's eyes and, without answering, she glided noiselessly out into the cold, bleak night and fed and gave shelter to the dogs.

Digitized by Google

Wolf seated himself upon a squat stool before a heavy, massive table, upon which was spread an ample meal, and fell-to, eating ravenously.

The breed girl entered as quietly as she had gone out and seated herself behind Wolf, staring intently at his broad back. Love gleamed in her black eyes, like the gleam of the sun appearing for the first time after the long arctic night, like the animal-love of the leader of the wolf-pack for its mate. And like the wolf-leader, this black-eyed girl would fight for this man, the man she loved with all the intense burning that came from the very depths of her soul. What is more, she *had* fought for him.

But lately, members of that irreverent community had begun to talk; had chided Wolf about his breed wife, saying that he was too good to her, that she was only a breed. That was not all, either. Stray bits of information, uttered by maudlin philosophers, came to Wolf's ears of his wife's infidelity. He heeded these remarks not in the least; he loved and trusted his wife and, to him, that was all that was necessary.

He treated his wife the same as other men treated their wives, in a brutal fashion, but not altogether with extreme cruelty. He played the lover gallantly at times, and even went so far as to chop the wood on various occasions, that is, when he was in an unusually good humor.

Finished eating, Wolf shifted on the stool, satisfaction written on his face, and leaned against the heavy table.

"Well, can't you talk? Whose funeral is it?"

The girl was plainly nervous, and her eyes failed to meet the steely gaze that she knew was directed upon her.

Wolf McInnis's eyes coalesced. Maybe, after all, this little slip of a girl was not true to him. He clenched his big, hairy hands, thinking whether he should vent his rage or not. No, he was too satisfied. He settled himself again, and lit his pipe.

"Who's dead?" he queried again. "Damn! I'm getting mad, Celeste. Answer me."

"Brute McKenzie," gasped the breed girl in a barely audible voice.

"McKenzie dead!" cried Wolf.

The girl's slender frame throbbed, pulsated as if she had the ague. Her wealth of dark hair, falling in long tresses, hid the trickling tears on her cheeks.

"He didn't die a natural death, I'll warrant," bellowed Wolf again, all arage now. "Who killed him? By God! I'll kill the man who——"

His pipe clattered to the floor.

"Don't, don't," pleaded the girl.

Her usual calm had returned to her and she wiped the tears from her cheeks. A look of defiance came into her eyes.

"Brute McKenzie was no frien' to you, Wolf. He mak believe, but really no."

"That's a lie!" snapped Wolf. "Brute was a good pardner. How'd you think we two could have run the Golden Eagle, if he was no friend of mine. You always were leery of Brute. Say, what's come over you, Celeste? Your hand's trembling."

"I drink too much black coffee." Educated at the Mission school she spoke fairly good English. "I say again, Brute was no frien' to you."

"No friend, eh! I'm getting sick of your cringing, whining attitude around here. I'll make you say something."

He rose and took the thong whip from a peg on the wall. The girl, with a dry little sob, dropped to her knees at Wolf's feet. He had never used the whip before.

"Are you going to say something now, instead of dictating to me, and telling me who my friends are and who ain't? Who killed Brute McKenzie?"

He raised the whip and the long lash swished overhead, but in the small room the short-stocked whip was not effective; the thong snapper caught in the net-work of a snow-shoe that hung on the wall. Wolf cursed and flung the whip from him. The girl did not cringe, only stared up at the man she loved, mute appeal, almost dog-like, in her eyes. For some reason the man did not strike her.

"Are you going to tell me now?" he cried, grasping her by the shoulder.

"Yes, Wolf. I tell you all," she answered.

"Hurry up with it, then." He was tired and irritable.

"You interrupt, Wolf. I can not tell story."

"I won't get mad or interrupt. Go on."

Seated at Wolf's feet, resting her head against his knee, she told her story simply; in true Indian fashion, neglecting not the smallest detail.

"I say again, Brute was no frien' to you," Celeste repeated. "He mak you think he was, but no. He mak trick behind your back. He a beeg coward."

Digitized by Google

"Ugh!" grunted Wolf.

"My mother," she continued on an entirely different track, "arrive two day ago from Nulato. I very glad to see her, too. My sister and Pierre very glad to see her. She with them now."

"Yes," said Wolf.

He knew the Indian method of narrating a story, and in the end he knew he would learn who killed Brute McKenzie. If he interrupted he would never know that night, so he remained quiet and listened.

"Last night," Celeste went on, "my mother go with Marie and Pierre to the Golden Eagle. There they drink and watch dance. Pierre, he get drunk and mak much fun. Marie, on the quiet, start for back door to get sled and dogs to take Pierre home. In back room she come on McKenzie and Le Bref. She hear McKenzie say: 'We reach Unalakleet in time to mak boat. Money under that board in floor.' Marie, when she hear dat, know McKenzie going to rob you.

"She sneak, queeck by room and out back door. There she see dog-team all ready for journey. She come here and tell me what she hear. I go with her to Golden Eagle and wait outside window where I could see McKenzie and Le Bref. Very soon Marie and my mother and Pierre come into room where McKenzie and Le Bref are. McKenzie, he get mad and try to put Pierre and Marie out. He see my mother behind them and stare at her.

"He offer my mother whisky. She go to drink it, when Marie knock bottle out of her hand. This mak McKenzie mad. He go to strike Marie. My mother interfere. He strike my mother instead. Pierre was too drunk to do anything, but he pull his gun."

"Then Pierre killed him!" cried Wolf.

"They all think Pierre kill McKenzie, but Pierre only shoot in air. He too drunk to hit anything."

"Who killed him?" queried Wolf impatiently.

"I shoot him," Celeste whispered.

II

THE second morning after the shooting, Kaltag lost its drowsy air of melancholy mourning and awoke suddenly to bustling, active life. The late tragedy in which Kaltag had been deprived of one of its ablest and most highly esteemed citizens formed the humming trend of conversation. And to think that a drunken, worthless Frenchman had committed the deed in a riotous brawl over an Indian squaw.

Brute McKenzie, joint proprietor with Wolf McInnis of the Golden Eagle, was dead. The Golden Eagle would be compelled to suspend its gay festivities for a brief space of time, whereupon its frequent loiterers, breeds, miners and painted women, would be minus a home of revelry. This impalling fact rankled deep in the breasts of each wildly chattering citizen, even more than the death of Brute McKenzie.

A gaunt, lean miner, coming in from the region of upper Norton Sound, halted his dog-team before one of the garrulous groups. A big trapper detached himself from the little crowd and came forward.

"Howdy Rod," he greeted. "Heard the news?"

"Aye," replied the miner. "A breed told me out yonder on the North trail. Too bad, eh? Who shot him?"

"Pierre le Chauve, the little dark-skinned Frenchman. Got drunk and just naturally let loose."

"Dirty shame!" exclaimed the big miner. "What's Wolf McInnis doing about it? Those two were powerful good friends."

"That's it. That's what we're all wonderin' at. We don't know what Wolf'll do. You see he ain't here. He went up-country a ways and weren't here at the time of the shooting, which took place night before last. We expect him today, though."

"He'll rip things up when he larns the news," said the miner.

"That he will," replied the trapper.

And the majority of the impious citizens of Kaltag thought the same thing, that Wolf, a potent factor in the law-making of the community, would tear things loose upon his return, and above all things imaginable, close the Golden Eagle, for Wolf McInnis was sheriff of Kaltag.

Wolf rose early that morning but he did not hurry. He breakfasted leisurely and quietly, saying not a word. Celeste looked haggard and tired, but performed the necessary chores with a rugged determination. Upon leaving her, Wolf said simply—

"Keep quiet and wait."

He spoke no word of pleasant leave-taking, no word of encouragement, only his

Digitized by Google

hard, steely gray eyes seemed to pierce to her throbbing heart as he gave her that last deliberate look, and then left her, standing agape in the doorway of the shack.

Celeste, listening to the dull *crunch, crunch* of the snow under his feet, watched him sidle down the snow-heaped, narrow street until he disappeared around a corner. Then she turned back into the room, sobbing.

The sheriff's sudden appearance caused a commotion. Outside the Golden Eagle he was surrounded by an eager, questioning mob. Where was his dog-team? When did he arrive? Did he know? His quiet demeanor deceived them. He must have just arrived. Who was to break the sad news? The news that would turn McInnis into a maddened beast.

Le Bref, the Frenchman, ruddy and bloated of face, volunteered his services as leader and speech-maker.

"Ma'sieur has not heard——?"

"Yes, I know everything," answered Wolf quietly.

The crowd stared into each other's faces bewildered.

"Where is he?" asked the sheriff.

"Who, ma'sieur?" stammered Le Bref.

"Le Chauve."

"He is in your wine-cellar bound hand and foot," snapped Le Bref.

"I want to see him," answered Wolf, turning his back on the amazed mob and entering the door of the Golden Eagle.

The crowd surged in after him.

"I must see him alone," Wolf said decisively.

He descended the narrow, creaking steps to the cold, damp wine-cellar, leaving the mob to gape after him. Lighting a match he took a long look at the little Frenchman, noting the mute appeal in the misty, hazy eyes. Then he returned to the floor above.

The mob was anxiously awaiting him, congregated in the spacious barroom. Le Bref, perched upon a salmon packing-case, was making a speech. Emerging into the room Wolf was just in time to hear the Frenchman bawl—

"The committee decide that Pierre shall hang at dawn tomorrow."

"Hang him!" the big, raw-boned men of the north cried.

Wolf's return caused a hush in the proceedings. Le Bref paused in the middle of a sentence, finger poised in air.

"Boys," cried Wolf, "step up and have a drink on me. Drinks all around, Jean."

The bartender hustled behind the bar. The crowd hesitated. Were their ears deceiving them? Then they realized the potentiality of Wolf's invitation.

"Hurrah for Wolf!" somebody shouted and the rest joined in with the cheer until the building trembled.

Le Bref was the only man who remained silent. He was thinking.

"The Golden Eagle'll run on just the same. We'll have a big time tonight, boys," the sheriff went on.

"Hurrah!" shouted the men.

Later in the day, after the excited mob had become good-natured and had thinned out somewhat, Wolf, unobserved, inspected the back room which had been the scene of the shooting. He found the hiding-place in the floor that McKenzie had used to conceal the money. He raised the loose board and fumbled in the opening. The money was gone.

"Le Bref!" he hissed under his breath.

Turning his back on the Golden Eagle he tramped homeward, the sinister words trembling upon his lips. He repeated the sentence over and over, dimly sensing its horror and what it meant to him:

"Pierre to hang at dawn!"

III

UPON Wolf's arrival at his shack he found that Celeste was not alone. In the atmosphere of the room there was a certain degree of sublimity. Celeste, pillowing Marie's head upon her breast, was huddled before the dying fire. An Indian squaw, mother of Marie and Celeste, knelt in one corner, weirdly chanting the death-song of her tribe.

Flickering shadows, cast by the oil lamp, crept ominously, playing upon the women's faces. Cold little drafts of air seeped in through the cracks of the shack and scurried around the border of the room, chilling the interior.

Outside a moaning wind lulled through the tops of the pine trees. From the ridge of a towering drift, that rose like a prison wall, the leader of the wolf-pack gave vent to a long, mournful howl. Like the squaw's, it was a death-howl, for beside a fallen tree, half hidden in the drift, was the lean body of the wolf-leader's mate.

Digitized by Google

McInnis replenished the fire and the blackened coals leaped into flame, brightening the room. Celeste's eyes were full of anguish and fear.

"What happen, Wolf?" she asked querulously.

The big man gave her a hard stare, gazing long and earnestly into the depths of her black eyes. Never before, even on his long trips to the north, had he realized his great love for her. But now, like the wolf-leader with its mate dead, he suddenly became aware of life's unendurance without this little breed girl.

"Pierre is to hang at dawn," he answered.

A startled cry came from Marie.

"But he won't," Wolf went on. "Not if I can prevent it."

He gritted his teeth with the final resolve.

This time the cry came from Celeste. She misinterpreted Wolf's remark and fierce attitude as pertaining to her. He would hand her over to that mob which was eager for revenge. She did not care. For this man she would die willingly.

"What's the squaw singin' the death-song for?" asked Wolf.

"McKenzie dead," replied Celeste in a whisper.

"Wall, what's that got to do with her?"

"Once upon a time, long ago, she know McKenzie. They good frien's."

"First time I ever knew it," said Wolf, seating himself for his evening meal.

Finished, he lit his pipe and went on—

"Tonight I want all of you at the Golden Eagle." He indicated the three women with a wave of his hairy hand. "There'll be doings tonight," he continued.

IV

LATER that evening the lights of the Golden Eagle blazed forth with a dazzling lure. Within pandemonium reigned. The reeking stench of liquor permeated the dance-hall where big-booted men with scraggy beards and frost-bitten faces shuffled a polka or cavorted in a Virginia Reel with all the grace of big grizzlies.

Spring had arrived and the place was full, for the gaunt, haggard miners and trappers had come into Kaltag, after a long, hard arctic Winter, to let loose their pent-up passions in mad revelry. Painted women, with rouged lips and blackened eye-brows, nestled close, settling into the languorous rhythm of the dance with grotesque contortions.

Wolf McInnis, though his face was slightly drawn, lolled against the bar, laughing and joking and chatting with his various patrons. Celeste, Marie and the Indian squaw were huddled closely together in one corner, scarcely heeding the wild festivities. They were there for a purpose. Something was going to happen. A crisis was pending which would involve the three of them, along with the thin-faced Frenchman in the wine-cellar below, and the man who lay pulseless and cold in a rough pine box in the back room.

The squeaky notes of an accordion, mingling with the sharper twang of a violin, gave harsh music to the ribald crowd, but it did not mar the cadence.

Rod, the big trapper, his friend the miner, and Le Bref were conspicuous figures. Wolf noted the Frenchman with a malignant smile.

The thrumming of the instruments had stopped, the dance was over. The hilarious crowd filed out to the bar-room. Singing and individual dancing held sway. Suddenly there was an abrupt silence, for Wolf McInnis had raised his hand and was speaking.

"I guess you all wonder why this yer high life is going on tonight? . . . I'll tell you. The devil is dead and we're celebratin' him. Did you get that?"

There was a pause; his face clouded; his jaw was shoved out, showing his extreme aggressiveness; his steely gray eyes gleamed with combativeness. An ominous hum spread over the room.

" 'Cause I'm sheriff here, you've all wondered why I didn't get riled up over McKenzie's death. I'll explain that, too. McKenzie was a thief!"

This startling revelation brought the crowd to their feet with a roar.

"It's a lie," piped Le Bref shrilly.

"It's a lie," cried the crowd in chorus.

They moved forward in a threatening manner.

"None of that," cried Wolf.

A long, blue-steel barrel covered the room menacingly. A hush settled over the amazed crowd.

"Do you think I'd let you hang Le Chauve? Wall, I should say not. Pierre is free. Bring him out, boys."

The little Frenchman, half frozen and

Digitized by Google

grimy, was helped out before the dazed spectators by Rod and his friend the big trapper.

The crowd gasped.

"Give him some brandy," commanded Wolf. "That's right. Now Pierre, you're free."

"Free!" was the startled exclamation. "Lynch him!"

The blue-steel gun barked and as the powder-stench lifted, the room was again silent.

"If Le Chauve did not shoot McKenzie, who did?" sneered Le Bref, nourishing his wrath. "I see him with my own eyes. *Mon Dieu!* my eyes do not lie."

"My wife shot McKenzie," replied Wolf, "because he intended to rob the Golden Eagle of all its money."

"It's a lie," snapped Le Bref again. "You'll have to prove it, ma'sieur."

"I'll prove it easy enough," answered Wolf. "Search him."

Rod and the trapper stepped forth and deftly went over the Frenchman's person. They relieved him of his money-belt and Wolf scrutinized the contents carefully.

"The Golden Eagle's money," he said, holding up the belt and letting the gold pieces clatter on the bar.

"Le Bref and McKenzie were pretty close, weren't they? That's proof enough, ain't it?"

A scarlet flush appeared on Le Bref's face, and the crowd stared in awe. A somber silence fell over that irreverent gathering. Then, soft and low, came that weird chant from the direction of the back room. The big miner and trapper held Le Bref, while the crowd noiselessly tiptoed after Wolf.

Around the bier in the back room the three women were softly chanting. Celeste, when she saw Wolf with the crowd at his back, cringed against the pine box. The man she loved was going to give her over to that mob.

"Don't be frightened, Celeste," Wolf said quietly. "They are here to congratulate you."

But the crowd only stared.

He encircled her with his arms and she crept closer, nestling her head upon his great shoulder. Then, suddenly breaking away, she uttered a long, mournful wail, and flung herself upon the open pine box, her black tresses falling upon the white, marble face.

Wolf drew her back, astonishment plainly written upon his face. Her misty, black eyes found his.

"McKenzie, he was my father," she whispered.

Silently the big men removed their hats, and tears slowly trickled down the hard faces of the women. With due respect for the little breed girl they filed out of the room and out of the Golden Eagle, leaving the mourners alone with the dead man. The squaw began to chant again the dismal death-song of her tribe, and this time Wolf McInnis understood, for, unlike the leader of the wolf-pack, he had regained his mate.

Digitized by Google

"For Tricks that are Vain"

by Norman Springer

A NARROW alleyway connected the court of the Two Brothers with the street. Three sides of the court were high, blank, warehouse walls. The fourth was the darkened front of "Black Pete" Crone's groggery.

Crone sat at the single table in his silent barroom. The table, a half-stocked bar, and a police proclamation, were all the law had left him. Crone had come a cropper; his den was closed by fiat; his pockets were empty. He morosely sipped his gin and reviled his luck.

Black Pete Crone was a lean, swarthy man with a predatory face. His ways were smooth and subtle—as became one whose trade was villainly, and who lived and labored in that part of Singapore that lies between Malay Street and the coal-docks.

A soft voice and a pussy foot; a sharp wit and a quick hand—these were Crone's chief assets. He had walked long and far on the crooked road ere he stumbled; and sailormen the world around damned him for the vilest crimp between Suez and Vladivostock.

Out of the hot, black night, a man and a woman came into the court of the Two Brothers and knocked upon Crone's door.

"Mr. Crone," said the man, when the crimp unbarred the door, "I am looking for lodgings."

"Strike me blind!" exclaimed Crone. "If it ain't Tom Gee Bong, my little Oxford fancy man—and with a woman!"

The man and woman advanced into the room. Crone shut the door; then eyed his visitors speculatively.

The man was a Chinese—yellow, slant-eyed and youthful. His dress was the conventional white drill of the Occidental, and his speech that of an educated Englishman. The woman was wrapped in a cloak that partially hid her Chinese garb. The crimp's eyes widened as he moved his gaze to her. Crone was a judge of women.

"You can put me up for a day or so?" inquired the Chinaman.

"Put you up?" echoed Crone. "Oh, ay—maybe."

"I wish to lie 'doggo'," said Tom Gee Bong. "And it would not pay you to betray me to the police. You will get more money out of me."

"The police! Who said the police?" cried Crone. "Ain't I your friend, Tom? Of course I'll put you up. I'll give you my own room, just back of this one."

He indicated a door at the back of the barroom.

Digitized by Google

"That will do nicely," said Bong. "And now, if you will give her a light, I'll send the woman in there. Then you and I will have a little talk."

Crone lighted a battered tin lamp. Tom Gee Bong handed it to the woman and addressed her in the bastard Cantonese of the streets. Crone pricked his ears, for he understood the vernacular.

"Go you to the inner room," commanded Bong.

"Why so?" demanded the woman. "Have I not half share?"

"Go you to the inner room," reiterated the Chinaman, and his soft voice took on a rasping edge. "It is not meet that a woman sit at men's counsels."

The woman took the lamp and sullenly withdrew. Crone and the Chinaman seated themselves at the table.

"Mr. Crone," said Bong, "I have come to Singapore on a very delicate mission. . . No, thanks, I seldom drink—never, when I have business ahead of me. I need your assistance in one or two minor matters."

"I'm with you," said Crone. "I ain't got a quid to my name—I'm game for anything."

"No," answered the Chinaman, "it is nothing like that. I want you to procure for me tonight the complete garments of a Chinese merchant of the middle class. Also, engage a 'rickshaw and have it waiting at nine in the morning."

Crone studied the bland face opposite him.

"Let me in on it, Tom," he begged. "I'm up against it."

"Ah," said Bong. "I understand you have had some bad luck?"

"Bad luck!" exclaimed the crimp. "They got me proper. I lifted a bum into a Yankee bark with a swat behind the ear, and the blighter turned out to be a blasted Dutch count who was doing some slummin'. They stripped me clean to keep me out of quod and I'm closed up for good." He spat disgustedly. "S'help me, Tom, it's gettin' so a bloke can't turn an honest penny any more. I'd leave the blasted colony if I had the price. Let me in on this trick of yours, Tom. Lord, I need the stuff—and you know you can trust me."

"No," replied the Chinaman. "My business here is not of a nature that requires other aid than that which I have already requested. But I will pay you well, Crone."

He produced a well-filled pocket-book.

"Here is ten pounds. That will buy the clothes and leave something over besides. And, if I am successful, I shall reward you handsomely before I leave."

"All right, Tom," said Crone. "As you say—but I'm game to help, any time."

"I am tired," said Bong. "Be sure and have the clothes in the morning—and the 'rickshaw. Good night."

Crone stared at the door that closed behind the Chinaman. Crone was surprised. Not so much that Tom Gee Bong should seek shelter with him—he knew Bong of old—nor that Bong should be keeping under cover. There had been rumors of an exploit on the Australian pearling-coast.

Crone arose to his feet and paced the room in deep thought, trying to recall the gossip he had heard.

It was the woman, especially, who surprised Crone; and he was accounted a connoisseur in women. A half or a quarter caste, Crone decided; no broken spirited Chinese slave there. He recalled the rebellious face she had turned to the Chinaman. And the face! Crone swore softly, and by the mark of the One he served.

"By the Horns of the Devil! She'd fetch a pretty price in Perak!"

The crimp picked up the bank-note Tom Gee Bong had left on the table. He considered a moment, then he quietly opened the street-door and let himself out into the night.

At the shop of Ah Gow, the pawnbroker—which is next door to the Temple of the Joss of Good Luck, in the street called the Tomb of the Mo Family—Crone procured the garments Tom Gee Bong desired. He also procured some information. His guarded inquiries took him through the establishment of Ah Gow and into the opium-room of the Joss House.

There he interviewed several half-clad, various colored devotees of Chance and the Pipe. The talk was about ships and pearls, and the recent season on the pearling grounds.

". . . And was I not a diver on the *Swan*?" exclaimed one brown-skinned Malay, stirred to protest by Crone's skilful skepticism.

He sat up on his mat and brandished his pipe to emphasize his remarks.

"With my own eyes I saw the pearl. Pande Lall, of my own village, brought up

Digitized by Google

the shell—a great shell of many knobs—and the shark took him under as he dropped it into the boat. It was accursed with evil luck from its birth. . . . But such a pearl! It was black, and perfect, and double; two spheres grown together. They called it the Black Sisters. . . . It is the Evil Eye, and misfortune follows it.

"Yes, it had disappeared. There was a knifing. They said the Chinaman got it—but who can tell? . . . Yes, there was a woman . . . they said she aided the thief. No such prize had come up in a man's lifetime. A hundred thousand Singapore dollars would not be its worth."

Crone left the Temple of the Joss of Good Luck with the clothes for Bong under his arm, and his eyes narrowed to an absent, calculating squint. He stopped on a corner and singled out one of a group of 'rickshaw coolies who were clustered about the stand of a peripatetic vendor of rice. To him Crone spoke for a moment, then continued on his homeward way.

THE next morning, while Crone was enjoying his after-breakfast drink, the door of the inner room opened and Tom Gee Bong appeared. The Anglicized Celestial had discarded his Western garb for the clothes Crone had purchased the night before—a Chinese merchant's dress.

His features had been cunningly penciled, and the countenance he turned to Crone was not the youthful mask of Tom Gee Bong, but the lined face of an old man. The crimp exclaimed in admiration at the simple and effective disguise.

"Good morning," greeted Bong. "Is the 'rickshaw waiting?"

"By ——, Tom," cried Crone, "you are a cute one—that rig! Yes, the coolie's been waiting for an hour."

"Ah, I am glad you approve of the dress. I must be careful, you know. I shall return before noon."

Crone stared after the departing Chinaman.

"Now, I wonder——" he muttered; and sought his glass, and fell into a brown study.

The woman aroused him. He had not heard her approach, but he looked up and saw her before him. The sunlight, streaming through a broken shutter, glinted on her shock of hair—not the slick, black mess of a Chinese woman, but a thick mop of copper-colored ringlets. Her skin was like old ivory. Her bright, slanting eyes met his boldly. She addressed him in the Pidgin English of the Torres Straits.

"Him fellow Bong—him gone?"

Crone looked at her, and found her desirable. He spoke in the vernacular.

"O Shining One, you are like the flower of morning."

The woman laughed and replied in kind:

"The flower is plucked, O Great Ape. Did he tell you where he was going?"

"No," said Crone. "Did he not tell you?"

Her eyes sparkled with anger, and she burst out rebelliously.

"He tells me nothing. I am a slave. It was different when he needed my help. Now, I am forgotten."

"So," said Crone soothingly. "It is the way of his race. A white man would be different. He would not be ungrateful after you had——"

"But for me he would never have gained——"

The woman checked herself with a gasp and studied the face before her. Crone's eyes were narrowed to slits, and he hung on her words.

"——Gained the pearl!" he finished, smilingly. "The great Black Sisters pearl! You see, I know—but do not be alarmed; I am to be trusted. Is it the pearl that brings Tom Gee Bong to Singapore?"

"You are shrewd, O Sharp Eyes," said the woman. "I have said too much already. You will not tell him I have spoken with you?"

Crone followed her to the door with soft words and blandishments.

"I tell nothing. I am as dumb as the stones. You are too pretty, my sweet, to be wasted on Tom Gee Bong. You should mate a white man. We will talk again? And, your name, O Full Moon——"

She paused in the doorway and threw a glance over her shoulder—a flash of white teeth.

"Me Warrigah," she said in English.

Then she slipped into the back room and closed the door.

Crone returned to his bottle and his thoughts, and his thoughts were of the woman.

She would fetch a pretty price, truly. A wife for a Raja. He knew where she would bring half her weight in silver dollars. Old Gugat of Perak, for instance—or in

Digitized by Google

Bugis. Those bright, slanting eyes had held an invitation if he had read aright; and was he not a reader of women? She was a pearl of price—a pearl that must match that other pearl.

WHEN Tom Gee Bong returned an hour later, Crone was pacing the floor of the bar-room with a nervous, catlike tread. At the Chinaman's knock, he hurried to the street-door and opened it.

"Did your trip come out all right?" he inquired eagerly.

Bong wore a frowning, preoccupied air.

"Oh, yes—I'll want the 'rickshaw again this afternoon," he said absently.

He entered the back room and closed the door behind him.

Crone slipped softly out of the house and repaired to the alley that connected the court with the street. The 'rickshaw coolie was awaiting him.

"To the stall of the pig, Soonji," was the man's reply to Crone's question. "The merchant entered the house and remained there a long time. The pig, himself, saw him to the street, and they had great argument. We came straight back."

"Heard you the talk between the pig and the merchant?"

"No, Heaven Born, they stood far off."

Crone tossed the coolie a coin.

"The merchant rides out again this afternoon.

"By ——," he muttered, as he returned to the house, "just as I thought—the Chink has the thing on him. He's dickering with Soonji for a sale. With the woman on my side I might do it—but Bong is a cute one; it's a soft move and a slick one that gets ahead of him."

When Crone entered the barroom his ears were assailed by heated voices from the inner room. He tiptoed to the door and listened. Tom Gee Bong and Warrigah were quarreling. Suddenly there came the sound of a blow, and the stifled yelp of the woman. Then more blows, and her whining wail.

Crone crossed quickly to the corner of the room, lifted a coat from a hook on the wall, drew out his knife, and cut through the flimsy cloth and paper partition—a small square hole. He applied his eye to the aperture.

He saw Warrigah crouched in the far corner of the inner room, sobbing, and with an arm upraised and shielding her head. Tom Gee Bong stood over her with a short bamboo club in his hand.

He cast aside the stick and retreated out of Crone's sight. The woman looked after him with the face of a Fury. The Chinaman's voice sounded in a soft command, too low for the crimp to catch; and Warrigah slowly rose to her feet and moved toward the voice.

Crone replaced the coat on the hook, carefully concealing the spy-hole, and returned to the bottle on the table.

"I think," he said to his glass, "that Pete Crone is going to make a haul. Here's luck to him."

AT ONE o'clock in the afternoon Tom Gee Bong rode out again. Crone barred the door after the Chinaman's departure and turned to find, as he had hoped, the woman standing in the doorway of the inner room.

"Ah, my bird," he greeted her, "your lord is gone again. Know you where?"

Warrigah raised a face that was full of bitterness. A livid bruise adorned her forehead.

"He beat me," she said. "He beat me with a stick. When I cried out, he laughed."

Crone hid a smile and showed his sympathy.

"I know," he said. "It is the way of Tom Gee Bong. He is a hard man on women. And yet, you love him——"

"I hate him!" blazed Warrigah. "He was all fair words while he had need of me. Now I am discarded."

Her eyes were sullen and smoldering, and she showed plainly her Malay strain. Crone watched her keenly.

"Am I a dog to be so kicked aside?" she demanded.

Crone had a way with women—a way that had gained him a reputation. He brought water and clean rags, and bathed the wound on Warrigah's forehead.

"It was a wicked blow, little one," he said. "You must have given great offense to merit such a blow?"

"I but asked a question," answered Warrigah.

"So," said Crone. "The man is a pig to strike you so. You are too pretty to be wasted on that evil one. He does not know your worth."

Crone tried his way with Warrigah. His words were soft and honeyed and persuasive; and because he knew the time was

Digitized by Google

short, he pressed his suit with ardor. The clouds passed from Warrigah's face, and she smiled upon him. Two hours later, Crone's arm was about her waist and her head was upon his shoulder.

"But," objected Warrigah to a remark of Crone's, "the dog must pay for the shame he has put upon me."

"Yes, yes," said the crimp. "But the knife is messy and dangerous. I know another and a neater way. But it all depends upon him. He must drink when I ask him; otherwise——"

"The way does not matter," said the woman.

"Be at ease, little one. Tom Gee Bong has turned his last trick. We can lie quiet at old Gugat's in Perak while the thing blows over."

The sound of voices in the court brought the two plotters to their feet. Crone slipped across the room and peered through the shutters.

"Strike me stiff!" he ejaculated. "He's got Soonji with him." Over his shoulder he whispered to Warrigah, "He is here, and he has brought the money-lender with him."

Warrigah disappeared within the inner room and Crone proceeded to unbar the door. Bong entered with the money-lender at his heels.

Crone knew Soonji well. He was a Bengali half-caste; fat and oily, and with a reputation for close dealing and shady buying that stretched from Chitagong to Thursday Island.

The pair nodded a greeting to the crimp, and crossed to the inner room. The door closed behind them, and the bolt clicked shut. Crone slid noiselessly across the room to the partition, lifted the coat from its hook, and applied his eye to the peephole.

He had a fair view of the back room. Warrigah was crouched in the farther corner. Soonji and Bong were just seating themselves at a table in the crimp's direct line of vision, and the light from a window was full upon them. They promptly engaged themselves in a low-voiced conversation.

Presently, Tom Gee Bong thrust his hand within his tunic and drew out a chamois-skin bag. Soonji leaned closer. Bong spread a handkerchief on the table. He opened the chamois-skin bag, and there rolled out upon the white cloth a nugget of black flame. Soonji picked it up and held it to the light.

Crone caught his breath. Even his active imagination had fallen short of the reality. At a distance of thirty feet the pearl glistened like a living, glowing thing—almost the size of a walnut.

Suddenly Bong raised his voice; and Crone, pressing his ear against the hole, could plainly hear the words.

"It is my bottom price, Soonji. Five thousand pounds, cash. And the money must be in English notes of small denomination."

The money-lender interposed some low-voiced remark.

"No," said Bong, "you must bring the money here. I do not care to go out again until I am ready to leave for good. I am too well known—it is too risky."

Soonji again spoke, apparently agreeing.

"Very well," said the Chinaman. "It is agreed then. At ten o'clock tonight, in this room."

The voices sank again to an indistinct murmur.

When Tom Gee Bong and the Eurasian emerged from the back room, Crone was seated at the table over the inevitable squareface. The Chinaman escorted the money-lender to the court and closed the door behind them.

Crone jumped to his feet and turned to meet Warrigah in the doorway.

"Did you understand?" he asked excitedly. "They have made a bargain. The fat one comes tonight and gives money for the pearl. We must do our work before."

"No," answered the woman. "Do you not see? We have a chance to get both."

She spoke rapidly for a moment.

Crone swore admirably.

"You are right!" he exclaimed. "Let the pig pass the money, and get the pearl. I attend to him—then, as we planned."

"You are shrewd, my life," said Warrigah. "But here he comes!" She dodged back into the room.

"Blast me!" muttered the crimp, as he dropped into his chair. "She is a cute one. I don't know about Perak, after all. She's too valuable to sell."

AT NINE-THIRTY that night Crone and Tom Gee Bong sat chatting at the table in the barroom. Crone yawned and rose to his feet.

"Think I'll take a turn along the front,"

Digitized by Google

he remarked. "I've stuck close all day."

"Ah," said the Chinaman, with evident satisfaction, "shall you be gone long?"

"About an hour or so," returned the crimp carelessly. "Leave the door open."

Crone left the house and passed through the court and alley to the street. He turned the first corner, peered back for a moment, and then doubled swiftly on his tracks. In the black shadows of the court he composed himself to waiting.

After a while, along the silent street came footsteps. They paused at the court-entrance. The huge blot of the money-lender's bulk appeared, cautiously feeling its way through the darkness of the alleyway. Crone drew deeper into the shadows. The half-caste arrived at the door, knocked, and was admitted.

Crone waited patiently for the space of perhaps half an hour. Then he caught the sounds of movement in the barroom and heard a fumbling at the door-fastening. Swiftly the crimp slipped into the alleyway and flattened himself against the wall.

"Well, good-by, Mr. Soonji," came the sharp, clear voice of Tom Gee Bong. "Your visit has been profitable to us both, I trust."

There was an indistinct mumble in reply; the sound of the door closing; then footsteps approaching the alley.

Soonji came around the corner, head down, stumbling swiftly along. Crone waited till he had passed—then hurled himself forward. There was no outcry—just a swish and a thud as the blackjack struck the base of the half-caste's skull; and Soonji grunted, and crumpled up.

Crone leaned over the unconscious body and lightly ran his fingers over the man's clothes. He felt the prize in the breast pocket and with a satisfied chuckle drew out the chamois-skin bag. He pulled the body farther into the shadow of the wall.

"There," he said, straightening up. "He's safe until morning. Now for the Chink."

When he entered the house, the barroom was empty. A busy bustle from behind the partition indicated that Tom Gee Bong was preparing his departure.

Crone passed softly behind the bar and procured a fresh bottle of gin and clean glasses. These he took to the table. From the watch-pocket of his trousers he extracted a tiny bottle, examined it a moment, and concealed it in the palm of his left hand.

The door of the inner room swung open, and Tom Gee Bong appeared, followed by Warrigah. The Chinaman was once more attired in his Western clothes, and Warrigah was wrapped in the cloak.

"Well, Mr. Crone," smiled Bong, "I hope you enjoyed your walk. My affairs have come about as I planned, and I am leaving."

"Hope you won't forget your promise," hinted Crone.

"Of course not," replied Bong. "A promise is a promise. A hundred pounds would come in nicely, wouldn't they?"

"My bloody oath!" cried Crone. "By Cripes, you're a good sort, Tom! Have a drink before you go."

"Why," said the other, "since I'll not see you again, I don't mind suspending my rule and joining you in a little nip."

He took the seat opposite the crimp.

Crone flashed a look of triumph at the woman. She was standing behind him, at the end of the bar. Then he reached out and tilted the bottle and filled the glasses.

The Chinaman drew out his wallet—stuffed to bursting with money—and extracted several notes. The crimp's left hand lingered a moment over the other's glass, and he flashed another look to the woman.

Bong threw the money on the table.

"There is the hundred, Crone," he said.

"Thanks," said Crone. "Drink up!"

Bong picked up his glass, and held it poised in his hand. He smiled at the crimp.

"To our last drink together. I——"

A crash came from behind Crone. The crimp jumped and turned his head. Warrigah had knocked a bottle off the bar, and it had smashed on the floor.

"My oath! That gave me a rotten start!" exclaimed Crone. "Well, here's luck; drink hearty!"

He picked up his glass. Tom Gee Bong still held his suspended in the air. They touched glasses, and the Chinaman drank. Crone swallowed his liquor at a gulp, and leaned forward, his mouth widened to laugh.

The grin froze on his face, and the laugh died in his throat. A stream of fire surged through his veins, and Crone's eyes widened in sudden, horrified comprehension. He tried to speak—to scream—and was unable to utter a sound. His features twisted with agony as the poison he had meant for the other worked its way upon him—paralyzed his speech and gnawed at his vitals.

Tom Gee Bong leaned across the table

Digitized by Google

and grasped the crimp's left hand. He forced it open, and a little empty phial rolled out upon the table. He picked it up and examined the inscription—"strychnin."

"One should never turn one's head," he remarked pleasantly to the writhing creature before him.

He ran his hands over Crone's clothes and drew out from within the shirt-front the chamois-skin bag. He held up before the crimp's fast-glazing eyes the great black pearl—it glowed like the Evil Eye.

The woman came to Tom Gee Bong's side and threw her arm across his shoulder. The last mortal picture the fleeting soul of "Black Pete" Crone obtained was of two cruel, laughing, yellow faces. Then the convulsions seized him, and he rolled from his seat.

Tom Gee Bong returned the pearl to the bag and placed it in his pocket. He picked up the hundred pounds that lay on the table. He spoke to the woman. She nodded.

Out into the hot, black night went the two, with never a backward glance at the huddled, stiffening Thing on the floor.

The Adventurers

A Four-Part Story

Part One

By Arthur A. Nelson

Ten thousand Kings have fallen!
  Forgotten the thrones they hung
With gold and a million rubies,
  In the Song Never Sung! . . .
From the lost strand of Atlantis
  To the ends of the seventh sea
Rides the rusty ship of Adventure
  To the port of Discovery!

Helmsman, ah, dark Phœnician!
  Famed for your trader's brain—
Say, did yon redbeard Viking
  Follow your track again?

And you of the martial bearing,
  With the proud Roman face—
Which of your old-world Satraps
  Sailed ere we saw your race?

There by the swart Levantine
  Rides the Red Eric so bold,
Who followed the singing spindrift
  In his Sea-Snake of old! . . .
A Viking's thrall at the lookout,
  An Englishman down a-lee—
Goes the motley ship of Adventure
  To the port of Discovery!

CHAPTER I

THE GIRL OF THE PUBLIC SQUARE

TO THOSE other days I have not quite said good-by. Here in the prosaic library of my house at Rokesby, in Devonshire, as I look out over the wind-swept downs and see the tall old windows of Rokesby Kirk all aflame in the red glow of evenfall, it seems incredible that it was really I who actually passed through all of those things. And, looking back, it still seems half unreal that the Alan Severn who was the hard-bitten adventurer of the other land can be the same personage as this quiet Sir Alan of today: "Sir Alan Severn, of Severn Hall, F. R. G. S., V. C.," as the *Times* has it all formidably set forth in a smashing beat this morning; late of South Africa and the Rhodesian Irregulars.

Digitized by Google

And from this height of my amazing prosperity, I hark back to that time—and wonder! I have no quarrel with the present, save that the deeds of a man seem to have passed out of it. But for so long as it may take to set down this history, I shall live in the other days; for it is conceivable to change the present and even forestall the future, but a man's past is behind him and he can not duplicate it. So I sit staring into my ink-pool like some fabled necromancer of the "Arabian Nights," and see the vague sketch and caricature of a hundred old companions, black and white, in a hundred wild-goose chases, passing in brief review.

I stroll on the wonderful Rand, in its heyday; and all upon a day I step out of that life and into another, caught up and swept away in the master-plot of Cecil Rhodes. I stand once more with De Roquemort and the others in the ring of dark, staring faces in Matabeleland, and see the *assagais* flashing in the sun; and then by the spectral mountains, in the red glare of the eruption, watching the dead, black, unholy shadows creep across the sky-line. But best of all, I ride of nights and days to the House of Raylescroft—seeking for a lady, the "Rainbow Lady," as I used to call her in my dreams. For you may be sure of this: if I had never known and loved that lady, none of those things would have happened; and in fine, there would have been no story. And that takes me back to its beginning—the girl of the public square.

Slim, serene, with wide dark eyes set like jewels in her white face; her head tilted a little back with a beckoning gesture; her lips half parted in a radiant smile; while the sunlight streaming through the tall French windows enveloped her with the gilded aura of a saint and made a picture to remember; that is how I like to recall her best in our early meetings; not as I saw her first in the square, inert and pallid, with horror-stricken eyes staring down in those other eyes of death. That was Norma Raylescroft.

I REMEMBER as well as if it had been yesterday that day I rode up into Johannesburg town-square, in quest of trek-oxen; I was on the eve of starting up-country with René Duval, the noted sculptor of wild animals—the time he trekked across the threshold of this world into the next. Well, that was farther than he started for; but there is an old proverb of the pitcher and the well.

I am not likely to forget that day, for, though I had no fortune in getting oxen before the next day, something else transpired which I would not have missed for all the oxen in the Transvaal; and it was no more than a low word of thanks from a girl's lips, and a glance from a pair of memory-haunting eyes.

That scene comes up before me now like the visions of youth which are impossible to forget. I have only to shut my eyes and I enter the moving-picture show of memory. Picture after picture—they flash up abruptly, and pass; as real to me now as the rest of the world and these humdrum figures of flesh-and-blood Tommy Atkins in the making; of very undecorative rustic swains and too very decorative country squires, of all the Bill Stokeses and Peggy O'Tooles of the every-day—those prosaic Pillars of the British Empire, now beginning to straggle homeward by twos and threes in the early dusk, along the box-clipped hawthorn hedges flanking the road beneath my windows.

The familiar figures of the every-day have passed on and the hawthorn lane is silent. The tall old church-windows eastward are black in the gathering dusk. And so, while the pictures are flashing on the screen, let me go back to the girl with the memory-haunting eyes.

TO BEGIN in Johannesburg public square. Flowing by endlessly like a running stream in eddies, along the congested pavements and even down the middle of the street, was a cosmopolitan crowd made up of opposites and extremes; Boers, Englishmen, German curb-brokers and the omnipresent Jew; tall, half-naked Zulus from behind the far-away wall of the Kwathlamba Mountains; yellow-faced Griquas and cringing little Hottentots —"Totties," in the easy vernacular of Marshall Square. Close to the curb a Cockney street-hawker was crying his kickshaws and flimsy gilt trinkets to entrap the passers-by at his little stall.

Opposite him in the open lounged a vendor of a different stamp, who dealt in deadlier wares—one of the Kora tribe of nomadic Bushmen, employed occasionally by the South African representative of a great Hamburg firm of wild-animal trainers' to bring in wild things—all manner of oddities

Digitized by Google

—for shipment to the famous museum overseas. Near by him stood an oddly fashioned wicker basket containing his primitive stock in trade—a couple of wickedly venomous African cobras; while he awaited with the black man's eternal patience the august pleasure of the Agent, who, in no hurry for his part, was leisurely breakfasting within a noisy little bar around the corner.

At intervals an ugly-hooded head swayed sluggishly behind the holes in the basket-work, as if seeking something; and the by-standers saw a flash of deadly looking eyes and a lightning-like vision of a forked tongue darting out like a red streak of flame through the gaps in the loosely woven wicker. It was significant to them that the snake-seller did not lounge upon the basket, after the manner of natives when they have a long time to wait. Yet, if that silent nomad had but suspected it, he was standing over an active volcano, for reasons that will presently appear.

And now for the other part of the picture.

Out of the press came slowly a tall old man in his late fifties, but cast in some heroic mold. He was tanned as dark as mahogany and had the face of a Roman centurion, with long silvery-white hair and a flaming eagle's beak of a nose; and walked with a slight stoop belied by his great frame. At his heels came a girl who walked with a slow stride peculiarly rhythmic and unhurried; while the crowd—though it overflowed the curbs, and the great Rand plutocrats and official demigods steered meekly in the reeling wakes of ill-favored Boers in their cups, and the naked black shoulders of the Kaffir mine-boys—parted magically for her as she calmly advanced.

She was scarcely more than twenty, perhaps, for there was something in the lithe grace of her supple figure which subtly suggested youth, though her features remained hidden by the crowd. I began to wonder who she was and where she had learned to walk like that—like the great ladies I had once seen as a boy in England. The old Titan's daughter, to hazard a guess.

They stepped down at the curb and headed across the square, passing a few paces from where I was posted by my saddled nag, idly watching the crowds and drawing stage circles in the dust with the point of a heavy, old-fashioned hunting-crop, the kind of whip which is always "loaded" at one end with a piece of metal.

As they passed me I managed to get a fleeting glimpse of the girl's face, and experienced an involuntary catch of the breath. It was a lovely, perfect face of the rare type that engraves its image upon the memory. To look upon its splendid serenity was like gazing into the deep waters of some crystal tide; mere beauty was but a little part of what was pictured there. I was not one to rave over a pretty woman; but a face like that had never crossed my horizon until that hour, and it set my blood tingling.

Heedless of the crowd and looking neither to right nor left they went on, the old colossus in the lead and the girl close at his heels. Just ahead and directly in their path stood the half-naked Kora, engaged in a heated squabble with a couple of dwarfish Hottentots. His back was turned so that he did not see who came.

Suddenly with a scream the girl halted dead in her tracks, gazing as if fascinated at some object on the ground, while the old gentleman, turning too abruptly, wavered, lost his footing on the uneven paving-stones and fell. Unnoticed by the Kora by reason of his absorbing row with the "Totties," one of the cobras had worked its way through a gap in the wicker, which was old and worn and insecurely woven—not fit to contain deadly creatures—and that was why the Kora might as well have been standing over a raging crater.

A sudden swish on the pavement—one sinuous writhe and coil, and the hideous thing, infuriated almost to madness by the noise and the crowd, instantly stopped within a foot of the advancing girl—a living horror coiled to strike! She remained inert, paralyzed with fear and seemingly rooted in her tracks. The snake faced her with ominously swaying head, while the Kora turned around to see what was the matter; but seeing, stood as if spellbound and made no move to interfere. Neither did the spectators; nobody interfered. That was the other picture! It was not one to be soon forgotten.

Then the horrible spell was broken. With an oath I had thrown myself between the white-faced girl and the swaying horror on the ground, sweeping her out of the way. There was a moment of shuddering suspense—I saw two terrible little eyes burning wickedly into mine like a pair of diamonds;

Digitized by Google

and struck out suddenly with the heavy crop. The loaded whipstock lit true on the snake's swaying head. It collapsed like a shattered cricket-ball, and with my boot-heel I stamped it into shapeless pulp. The cobra writhed a little and lay still. The girl shivered slightly but recovered herself with an effort, and raised her eyes, alive with gratitude, to mine. It was like an electric shock.

"I can not thank you fittingly, but I shall never forget!"

It was all she said, but in the convincing melody of a remarkable voice her few words possessed the weight of a whole benediction. I hesitated; and under the level gaze of her eloquent dark eyes, I grew preposterously embarrassed. I could only stammer out some inarticulate reply.

The old Roman had picked himself up with astonishing celerity for one of his years. His great frame was still vigorous and active and his temper clearly none of the best; his irascible gestures were the reverse of everything senile. There wasn't anything the matter with him. He had slipped on the paving-stones. And as he began to speak his voice was vital and brusk, not to say brutally harsh, and he had a queer trick of jerking his words out as if they were nails that he forcibly extracted. He ripped out:

"My daughter is right—we can't thank you here. Of course it's not the place—this crowd! Damme, as thick as flies!"

He glared all around him several times like an enraged and indignant turkey-gobbler. He was very red in the face. A lot of people were staring.

"Curse 'em!" he cried. "Let 'em stare! You're a trump! A most remarkably prompt young man! You will come to see us tomorrow? The gray house on the hill." He took a fresh start. "You'll find that John Raylescroft never forgets a favor. That's my name; you'll have heard of *me* in Africa, I daresay. Queen's subject—There's my hand! And you, sir?"

"My name is Alan Severn," I answered.

"And your profession?" he jerked out.

"I'm—er—a sort of freelance, you know."

"Ah!" he muttered.

There was a world of meaning in his monosyllables. A shade of stiffness had come into his manner. He strove palpably to repress it and did not succeed.

"Never mind," he said. "Come out and see us anyway. But wait—lend me your whip!"

He took the crop from my unresisting hand and sprung with a single bound upon the astonished Kora. Seizing the man in a ruthless iron grip, he cut him half a dozen times across his naked shoulders—then deliberately gave him the loaded end twice on his bullet skull. It struck me as an odd procedure before a lady.

She did not wince nor cry out, but passively accepted the inevitable. I saw her glance swiftly at me and blush red with shame—and saw a wave of pity sweep across her face. At the second rap the poor wretch, half stunned, went lurching to the pavement and blindly essayed to crawl out of reach. He was too late. The whipstock fell again. He rolled over and lay quite still. Some one held his head and gave him Cape brandy.

Raylescroft faced up and bit down an oath. He had a strange expression in his eyes. It was plain that he was the owner of a black temper.

"There, you scoundrel!" he barked. "That will teach you not to leave poisonous serpents about in people's way!" He turned to me. "Thank you, Mr. Alan Severn, there's your whip! Come and see us tomorrow. Come, Norma, we can't stand here forever with all these people gaping at us open-mouthed!"

He wheeled about.

I am afraid I stared. So that was her name—Norma! It had, even in that old man's harsh, aged voice, a dreamily enchanting sound, like a chord of music. And followed by the dark-eyed, quiet beauty with the oddly fascinating name, that imperious old man turned away.

As for me, I could only stare helplessly, and wonder if I should take him at his word and go to see them on the morrow. It was a problem to set me racking my brains for the answer; and at length, half unsure of my reception, I decided to abandon the idea. And then, tossing the poor devil of a Kora, who had revived sufficiently to sit up, a sovereign in payment for his demolished cobra and his broken head, I turned and walked slowly back to the curb. The crowd had melted away.

IN THOSE days I was a professional "up-country man"—and in Africa men know the meaning of that phrase. I was a walking Baedeker—a

Digitized by Google

human handbook whose pages opened only to the touch of gold. From Nigeria to the Cape, and along the Ivory Coast, and even in the blazing sands of the Saharas, you may find them; they are the gentlemen-adventurers, the masterless mercenaries whose services any man may buy—for a price. It was a life impossible enough in any land but Africa.

It was inevitable, I think, for I had my share of the roving Severn blood, the compelling strain of the wanderlust.

Generation after generation the Severns had all been wanderers; it was some ineradicable impulse in the blood. And so I, too, had followed the call, as my father had done before me in his day—he had emigrated from Devonshire, in England.

I had traveled up by post-cart from Natal, making for the new Rhodesian goldfields—though I did not flaunt my going in the face of the dayshine. It was discreet enough, that flitting, and a bit *sub rosa;* for my father, a rather dimly shining light of the Colonial bar, had destined me for a barrister's career.

Even now it is vaguely disagreeable to review that first year's unloved friction with the chastening surface of my round-topped legal stool. Accordingly I had flitted. In time I had been forgiven for taking French leave, and was reluctantly acquitted of being cut out for a counselor. But fortune plays strange pranks. And in the upshot—stony broke—I had drifted into the mounted-police.

At first my hard-riding companions-in-arms, the ruthless, invincible spirits who matched immortal Balaclavan charges with the iron courage of Wilson's heroic Patrol, in that blind dash after Lobengula to the Zambezi, eyed me askance; for a barrister's son in the irregular-police was as great an oddity as a gentleman ranker in the army. Those long, wild, solitary rides across the quiet veld—a speck in a sea of bush—many of them night rides with only the moon and stars for company, made a man of me at last.

Later I saw service in two Matabele wars and learned how to take double toll for a steel-cased bullet fired from a Lee-Metford. They had an unhappy file-formation, those Matabele—and the English troops knew it.

At my discharge I had drifted gracelessly from one place to another, but managed in the meanwhile to see a deal of the country. For a while I set up at Bulawayo and prospered spasmodically until a day when the Cape-to-Cairo Survey arrived, and gave me the post of one of its hirelings—he had blown out his brains in the strain of a long African night at Nairobi, with the dreadful, mysterious, menacing beat of the native "bush-telegraph" drumming everlastingly in his ears.

Afterward I was made the overseer of a reeking crew of coolies on the new Uganda Railway. I remember very well how the word of my first promotion was brought to me at the billiard-tables of the Mombasa Club by the seaward windows looking on Kilindini Harbor—the long, low face of the fort; the gingerbread architecture of the Liwali's palace; and I remember that I was playing off a score with the young Liwali, who was going away to be educated at some place in Europe. I showed him my yellow telegram and he wished me luck, with a shadowy smile on his dark, Arab face; and then I went away.

He thought I would never come back; but I was fever-bit like himself; and in truth the berth suited me immensely, what with the big-game shooting and the wild life of the road-camps and the command of men of mixed nations—their lives were never worth much more than sixpence.

I had got something of a reputation as a lion-hunter, and it had got about. People had begun to point me out in the Protectorate, and I lived in an exaggerated atmosphere of repressed bravado, though I had very early schooled my features to wear a hard-set mask. But in those five years I was given the name of knowing the country as few men knew it; and so eventually I found my account in it. In a word, I turned freelance—became a gentleman adventurer-at-large. I had plenty of takers, and my services came high.

But there was risk enough. There was the fever-coast below Beira. Many hard things have been said of that reach of coast. Men of many lands have said them. In marble and in granite they are written—not as artistic efforts but by way of epitaph.

On the Admiralty Charts that coast is colored a watery yellow, ostensibly denoting its low elevation, but meaning in point of fact that it is the perennial abode of a grim and perilous monster—Fever.

To think that men have given up their own hearthstones and risked their all, tear-

Digitized by Google

ing themselves away from their friends and the bosoms of their families, from loving wives, perhaps, and the prattle of little children, for the "Silent Places," for this—the courtship of danger; to think of that is to realize what mysteries lurk within a human soul! Well, I have known many; the best and the worst of them. In the quick flood of my reminiscence, I see them go by, one after another; a gallant and picturesque crew.

There was H. H. the Prince of Pless, a decadent son of the warrior Goths and a great sybarite, for all his fighting ancestry, who trekked with me to the Zambezi Falls, and carried (by proxy) an amazing arsenal of sporting Mannlichers. The Mannlicher was the Austrian state service-arm. It is a wicked thing.

There was old Lord Melton, K. C. B., who took back to England as mural decorations a whole shipload of horns and hides —most of which he had procured from the native chiefs, for Melton seldom by any accident killed anything but time. To serve him was a perilous thing, for he let fly his dum-dum bullets quite as promiscuously as he scattered his good British sovereigns.

There was René Duval, the sculptor, who played with death once too often; for a mangy old lioness in Bechuanaland, which he had rashly stalked by moonlight, bit his windpipe right out one night when his gun-breech jammed—after he had fired two shots into her loins. After that the lioness decamped and died out in the bush. I found her the next day, all crumpled up like a wet rag, and cursed her; there was nothing else to do. We buried poor Duval under a frowning cliffside where the hyenas will never disturb him, and trekked straight home.

There was also a lady—the first and last to take me into her pay. It was the Inyanga Plains that trip, and the lady was the handsome, eccentric Countess Diane de Montfleur; a comely Amazon but peppery in the mouth; a dashing Diana (and she looked it) who lived up to her name and went on the warpath in light marching order. Merely to look on while Madame, in the final word in "abbreviations," contrived to miss four large eland, well bunched, at sixty paces, was to sign articles of slavery. She nearly always missed; but her shooting-kilts, though a trifle short, were wickedly becoming, and her figure was beautiful and *svelt*. She was very much "a matter of form," the Countess Diane.

And there was Banister, the Yankee millionaire. He had a mania for exploring a fever-smitten country, and burned with a barbaric lust to kill. He left a trail of bleaching bones behind him—until, upon a day, an old rogue rhino' met him in the narrow way. He pumped that grim beast full of lead-alloy made in the States—but he kept on coming like a brute Nemesis.

Before the end came, the rhino' had gored him twice and marked him for life with a twisted leg. In the sequel, his fickle fiancée in America had jilted him heartlessly, and married a rival millionaire who had displayed the good sense to stay at home and improve his opportunities and retain the conventional contour of his limbs. Fiancées are horribly unreliable things! And Banister himself, by last accounts, is doggedly limping across Tibet, with rifles and notes and aneroids; counting the dreary steps; hiding his disillusionment from the world—trying to forget!

There are many more whose names and faces I can not stop to recall; they are scattered now to the ends of the earth.

Finally there was the Rt. Hon. Cecil Rhodes!

Not the unreal Rhodes of the "Blue Book," nor yet the formal Rhodes of history, but the real Rhodes without the mask; the great adventurer whose colossal dream of empire made Africa and Europe reel. That was the Rhodes I knew. I was his old lieutenant in the great Annexation Plot—and I have come out alive! That fact seems wonderful enough to me. But you who scarcely know what the Rhodes dream was, save only from dark, discredited rumors, stifled overseas, from the shadows of dead events, and from the pages of discreet chroniclers who will not tell you all they know—you will smile rather skeptically perhaps. But Cecil Rhodes is gone to face a higher Court of Inquiry, and I let it pass. What is your unbelief to me?

CHAPTER II

THE HOUSE OF RAYLESCROFT

YESTERDAY I had decided not to call and be thanked; something in Raylescroft's eyes had repelled me. But the girl's

Digitized by Google

face haunted me. After all, why should I be a boor? Today I would play the gentleman; tomorrow I would trek. It would wipe the slate clean of errors—and she would forget.

It had taken me, in truth, until mid-afternoon to make up my mind to face that old cynic's chilling eyes. But at least it was the time-honored privilege of a gentleman to call and be thanked indefinitely; and I had as valid a right to the name as my clever cousin, Mr. Sheridan Severn, barrister-at-law. But he had held to the gentleman's estate, and presumably was still pounding away at the law, in England, while I had gone in for the siren-song of adventure and the dark places of the earth. You may not live your life upon the plane of the barbarian without getting some of the dust in your eyes.

And yet it is a vague enough thing to be a gentleman. It has its limits and its possibilities. For example, I could add that a certain wild henchman of mine, by name Ingulfa, sometimes called the "Wanderer," was very much of a gentleman on the whole, for a savage.

I suppose he was a savage; I am not altogether sure. He was a kind of latter-day Perseus in quest of a mythical monster; some terrific Gorgon. But he did not know that then, and neither did I. I believe there was something amiss with his memory; a hiatus. And so, without seeking a better pretext, I mounted and took the road to the House of Raylescroft.

Old Raylescroft had given me his direction in one of his laconic sentences—the gray house on the hill. It was not hard to find, for the house was a well-known landmark of the country around, and a Boer with a broken nose, of whom I stopped to inquire the way, pointed to the Krugersdorp road and told me it was a matter of an hour's ride. I came up to it at last as the afternoon was waning.

It was a huge fantastic pile, built altogether of hewn stone of an aged grayish-white hue, and it stood in a commanding position upon an upland crowned by a gigantic *kop*. The building itself was perched right at the top of this enormous egg-shaped hill, which, at an amazing expenditure of labor, had been leveled for the purpose—a strange and certainly an inconvenient dwelling-site. But Raylescroft, as I found out later, was a strange and uncommonly inconvenient person; and the location had one irresistible charm: it afforded a lovely view for miles around.

There was a broad avenue curving splendidly up the flank of the hillside, hemmed by a double row of beautiful eucalyptus trees, and the entrance was guarded by a tall iron gate resting upon two great stone pillars. And somehow this dwelling, which was built in the Gothic style of architecture, reminded me of some feudal castle of the Middle Ages; and it wanted little play of the imagination to see in Raylescroft himself a feudal captain of the most approved stamp. But there it stood, a frowning tribute to the forgotten past, and there he lived in medieval magnificence, like a robber-baron of long ago.

A Kaffir boy opened the gate and took charge of my horse. I stared up the tree-flanked avenue and espied a vision of beauty sitting, book in hand, upon a feudal, alcoved terrace. A moment after the vision vanished, flitting indoors at my approach. Her flight proved to be only temporary, and doubtless had to do with one of those purely feminine readjustments in which all women indulge on occasion, for by the time I had got to the end of the trees and reached the house I could see her white figure in the vestibule.

Fortune had elected to be kind for once, when she might have frowned. There was no juggling of a bell, nor any argus-in-waiting to usher me with cold formality into a room where the chilling shadows of conventions reigned like frigid little gods. The door was wide ajar, framing the picture which I never forgot, of the girl all in white—the girl of the square—and I looked at her with a queer catch in my throat. I had not said three words. She gave me a dazzling smile that set my head awhirl.

She was smiling still, her face half turned back, as I followed her mechanically into a handsome drawing-room with tall French windows. Possibly, too, she may have blushed a little. That was my entry to the enchanted mansion.

She was quick to put me at my ease.

"This is a belated pleasure!" she said swiftly, and her eyes swept my face with all a woman's intuition. "Candidly, I had given you up. I had fancied that perhaps my father—— But you must not mind him—he is my own particular bugaboo!" and she laughed. "You did not mean to come? Why did you change your mind?"

"That was the kaleidoscopic emptiness

Digitized by Google

of my life," I confessed candidly. "Perhaps it was the craving for something more elevating than the society of wild men—and the wish to have at least one priceless memory to take with me out there——"

I pointed vaguely at the edge of the horizon.

She measured me with eloquent eyes.

"And is your life, then, so empty? Well, that is strange! I have sometimes thought it must be grand to be able to forget the prosy littlenesses of civilized existence and boldly launch one's self into the unforeseen. Why, that is the very glamour of romance—that is life! But how can I thank you for that brave deed of yesterday! Oh, if I might find a way! But tell me, how may I make myself 'elevating'? "

"By forgetting 'yesterday'," I answered.

She seemed a little astonished.

"Will that please you? Well, I will try," she replied. "But I warn you that I shall not succeed."

"You make too much of it," I protested.

"Ah, well," was the quiet answer, "I do not think so. I saw it all, saw you stoop right over that horror to make sure! If you had stumbled, if your hand had erred by just one little inch—well, you would not be here. To you as well as to me that thing was deadly. Its eyes—— Oh, I can not banish it!"

"I too," I said, "have failed to banish all I saw."

She bent forward shuddering.

"You mean its eyes? Yes, they were dreadful——"

"You are quite wrong," I said. "I meant other eyes more perilous to me—the most perilous, perhaps, in Africa."

I said it slowly—deliberately; to save my soul, I could not have left it unspoken. The words positively uttered themselves. In the next second I would have given much to recall them. I saw I was in deep water. She reddened slowly to her temples, but finally threw back her head and laughed. In truth, it cleared the atmosphere.

"Ah," she said, "I am not dense and the subject shall be changed. How quick you are for one who is condemned to the society of wild men! But please do not uncork any more compliments."

"The cork flew out unbidden," I humbly apologized.

"Mercy on us! Then don't drop the bottle! It seems," she said graciously, "that men must say these things, and I have noticed always that the braver the men the worse they always say them. After all, it is an exclusively masculine prerogative, though I daresay you are quite puffed up with it; doesn't it demand a decoration?"

"None," I said daringly, "which is not fashioned in your likeness."

It was a long shot, at a venture. She turned her amused eyes upon me; and they had a curious effect of seeming to probe electrically into my soul. I met them abashed. I had an uncomfortable conviction that I was treading on dangerous ground.

"You are very exacting, but I am anxious to please. And I suppose you meant by that my picture? Well, you shall have it. It is little enough to offer in return for that dreadful risk of yesterday."

We got up together—she with the purpose implied in her words; and I, if the truth is told, to prevent her from carrying out that purpose, for I felt that I had permitted myself to go far, and my presumption was rapidly receiving an unforgettable lesson. I stammered out a hasty remonstrance, but she checked me quietly, and stepping into a hidden alcove in the recess of the window-seat she took some object from a drawer of a little rosewood secretary and put it into my hand.

I surveyed it spellbound. It was a handsome miniature portrait of herself, imprisoned in a little oval case of heavy gold, set with a circle of sparkling diamonds. It had been fashioned, as I learned later, by a Russian painter of some repute, who had drifted out to South Africa under a cloud and had been glad to get stray commissions of that sort. The case had been made in Paris by a famous jeweler, and must have cost a very pretty penny.

"I wish you to keep this, if you will," she said, so winningly that I was overtaken by a blush of shame. "It is all that I can offer you—and yet it is so little!"

She shivered slightly, and involuntarily raised one hand to her eyes, as if to shut out some disagreeable sight.

"Keep it, please; it is my earnest desire."

I would have given everything I owned in the world to possess the portrait; but somehow I found the grace to reply:

"It won't do, I am afraid. Perhaps I have presumed unpardonably; but there are still such things as honor and fair play.

Digitized by Google

Let me undeceive you as to myself. I am, unfortunately, a needy mercenary whose only lode-star is hard gold—and of that I have precious little—a grasping person, I assure you, a chance hanger-on in a pleasant world, a mere penniless adventurer. Now you have my measure!"

"You may be all of those things," she said quietly. "At least you are a brave man. I like brave men. Will you accept my friendship with the picture?"

I hesitated, weighing the miniature in my hand. I was not too great a simpleton to perceive that I had been cleverly driven into a *cul-de-sac*. To refuse that princely bauble was to reject perhaps her priceless friendship.

"It is still too little," she threw in, very pat with my thoughts.

"It is," said I very low, "too fine a reward for so poor a cavalier. This costly keepsake is overweight. To refuse it is very difficult, but to accept it would be sheer presumption. You are in error; such things are not for me. I have learned today a much needed lesson in manners—believe me, it shall not be forgotten. Be advised, and don't tempt me to change my mind. The prize is very alluring and human nature is weak."

Clearly the reply pleased her, for she laughed gaily and urged:

"Change it then, since it is my desire. For you see, womanlike, I mean to have my way."

I could do nothing less than capitulate with a good grace—and in truth, it was not hard to do. When a pretty woman sets her mind on a thing it is folly for a man to gainsay her.

"Presumption triumphs," I said. "Long live presumption! Permit me to observe that you have reversed the balance: I am the debtor now and you the creditor."

"That is not true, sir cavalier of pretty speeches," but there was a deeper undercurrent beneath the banter. "My debts are not so easily repaid. It is settled, then, that you will keep the trinket? You are wise to give a woman her way. And remember," she added demurely, "you can not banish it!"

"It is hopeless for me to try," I said; and fitting the action to the promise, I placed the miniature in my breast-pocket, just as a heavy step sounded in the hall. It was Raylescroft, returning from a visit to an outlying stock-farm. He greeted me a trifle more cordially than I had led myself to expect from his manner of the previous day, and even pressed me to remain and dine with them, an invitation I saw fit to decline.

He rummaged a decanter from a costly sideboard and made me drink a glass of port with him, all the while surveying me intently over the rim of his glass. His eyes seemed to bore straight into my brain. There was something masterful, striking, and yet in a way repellant in that old man. He reminded me of some warlike old Goth. For all his six feet of stature, he was paunchy to the verge of corpulence, with snapping black eyes, a powerful jaw strangely marred by the habitual and visibly cynical sneer around the lips, and hair prematurely silvered, I have sometimes thought, by his early adventurous life among the Zulu Kaffirs.

He had a private history, some of whose early chapters would not make pleasant reading. This, of course, I gathered at a later day.

Years before, Raylescroft had been the instrument in crushing a native uprising led by a bloodthirsty Kaffir chief named Mpandu who was another Dingaan, only on a smaller scale. At the head of a handful of settlers, chiefly Boers who had been inflamed by the Zulu atrocities, he had attacked Mpandu's people in their all but impregnable stronghold upon a wild spur of the Drakensberg, and, so the tale ran, after slaying the redoubtable Mpandu with his own hand, he penned up the unfortunate wretches in their mountain fastness until starvation finally drove them forth, when he destroyed them to the last man.

It was a terrible lesson and the Kaffirs in that part of the country never forgot it. But Raylescroft, though he was in reality a subject of the Queen, was rewarded by the Boer *Volksraad* with a vast tract of land upon which he had prospered exceedingly.

Raylescroft was a widower of fifteen years' standing. He lived with his daughter in that great somber house in almost feudal opulence, surrounded by a small army of Kaffir servants. He also kept in his employ a dozen or more white drovers and overseers. Most of them were Boers; he appeared to detest the sight of an Anglo-Saxon. He ruled them all with an iron hand and was said to be a hard taskmaster.

For all that, his daughter wound him

Digitized by Google

around her finger. She was the only being he loved on earth—or in heaven, for that matter; and her will was almost a law with him, save for certain obscure limitations. Precisely what those limitations were lay remotely screened in the labyrinth of his own hard brain; no man had ever unmasked them.

I came to know that household well in after days, yet its master was a riddle I never solved until the day I found him sitting stone-dead in his chair. I can see him still, sometimes, sitting there bolt upright with his eyes wide open, and clutching rigidly in his big dead hand the key—a mere slip of paper, with a seal and a bluish watermark and a blurred jumble of words and figures—which unlocked that puzzling cryptogram, himself. But that is getting ahead of the story.

I watched him now with an odd fascination—watched him pass abruptly from the room, leaving us there together. Outside, the red haze of evenfall was mellowing the veld. I rose reluctantly to go, and she followed me out on to the feudal terrace. We shook hands rather quietly. In that wonderful golden glow speech would have seemed like a sacrilege. I walked quite mechanically to the steps, but paused there. Something seemed left unsaid. . . . For a moment I stood silently staring at the inexorable, distant sky-line. Then I faced about.

"Good-by," I said. "I'm off for Bechuanaland tomorrow."

"Good-by," she said softly, and somehow I fancied there was a shade of regret in her voice, "and good luck!"

I mounted and rode away.

ONCE well out of sight of the House of Raylescroft, turning the bend of the road a mile away, I reined in my horse impatiently and drew out the miniature I had won. By fair play or by foul play I had won it—*it*, at least, was mine! A stray shaft of the sunset fell upon it and lit the flashing stones and the smiling face they encircled in its fading beam. I gazed at it long and earnestly, but the longer I gazed the more angry grew my thoughts; there was something mocking in its splendid sheen.

I was wise enough even then, you see, not to palter with the truth or attempt to disguise it from myself. I knew very well what had happened to me in the little space of twenty-four hours. I agreed to myself:

"Your race is run, Alan, my lad, but it won't do! Trust a fool to chase the rainbow, but you will never catch it! In fine, you are a greater fool than knave!"

The light faded. I put away the miniature and gave my horse the spur. He broke eagerly into his stride. My pulse was bounding. In that instant my mind was made up. It was all inevitable; all irrevocable. No man may fight his destiny; and if it was mine to chase the rainbow, I would follow it with a strong heart.

But between Johannesburg and me lay just at present an hour's stiff canter. I made it in half, riding like a musketeer.

The moon came up early and threw a silvery radiance over everything as I rode into the outskirts of the great gold town. Here and there outlying Kaffir huts, and beyond them long lines of corrugated iron houses, lay bathed in a quiet mystery of light. Tall, grim, iron stacks, colossally slender, stood out against the sky-line like giant black fingers striving to clutch a star. Enormous cyanide-vats squatted cheek-by-jowl in double tiers; elevated trams hung daringly in mid-air. Slime-wheels, trestles, and huge, detached masses of mining-gear loomed immense and ghostly as I advanced on them—then vanished like so many specters as I clattered by.

I rode straight into the heart of the town and into a blaze of electric lights; on past the Rand Club and the Arcade, with its shops and glitter of plate-glass, and down a broad modern thoroughfare teeming with life to every beat of its metropolitan pulse.

I kept on at a slow pace till I came to the place I sought, a snug little café off the square, kept by a suave old Greek, universally known as "Papa." Here, dismounting at the curb and giving my horse to a stalwart Pondomise "boy" to hold, I entered and presently dined to my unalloyed satisfaction. Then at length, pushing back my chair from the little marble-topped table, I tossed a stray rupee to the East Indian party who had brought in the things, and settled my shot with the cashier, an olive-faced son of Athens, in the coin of the South African Republic.

Such was Johannesburg, the "New Jerusalem," Johannesburg the cosmopolitan and amazing. All the polyglot spindrift of humanity foregathered incongruously

Digitized by Google

there in its streets; yes, and in my pockets were the coins of half a dozen nations. Had I wished, I might have found both the match and takers for them all.

Then I made for the street, congested with a motley current of pedestrians representing nearly every nationality under the moon. I halted at the tall façade of a hotel, into which I dived familiarly and passed up a faded red-plush stairway to the rooms of René Duval.

A dark-complexioned young man in velveteens, with a little, spiked mustache, and very black, very round eyes like rapier points, sprang up from a remarkably realistic figure of a life-size lioness crouching to spring, modeled in plastic clay, and came over to me with his face alight with an oddly winning smile.

"Ah, Alan my boy," he bubbled, "look! I have been giving her ladyship a pair of topaz eyes. See, is she not abominably fine? *Ma foi!* One has one's dreams at night! . . . Sometimes I dream of a lion springing at me like that!" And he shuddered a little at the depths of his own realism.

A distinguished foreign diplomat who chanced to be stopping at that hotel had, upon a time when he had seen the bottoms of too many tumblers, come into that room by mistake. The distinguished F. D. had whipped a big revolver from his waistband and backed away hastily with an amazed look of fear and wonder on his face, and a string of very lurid curses.

Duval laughed again at that memory. But in a minute he had fallen into succinct talk that took in many things—oxen, for instance, tardily acquired that morning; and the enlistment of a brace of Bechuana "trekkers," and guns, and tinned abominations—talking very rapidly, with enough gestures to fit out a school of elocution. By that time I was beginning to yawn in his face.

Then, declining Duval's proffered ginger-ale, downstairs and over the way to a quiet little bar for an honest peg, served with a languishing smile by a rosy-cheeked British barmaid. I was a pretty fellow then, it seemed. Then to horse, and back again over very much the same route. It was close upon midnight when I finally drew rein at the gateway of the rambling old stone house where I had quartered myself as a lodger upon the fat and forever-beaming Tante Van Salm.

CHAPTER III

A JACK-POT FROM OLD KENTUCKY

A TALL black shadow, monstrous in the moonglow, rose abruptly in front of me and clutched at the bridle. The startled gray reared, but it was only Ingulfa, who had a weird way of turning up when you least expected him.

To any one possessed of nerves the apparition of a bronze colossus rising up apparently out of the earth would have been a shock; but I was used to him. I was used to his size and his mysterious ways. Yet there was one thing I never had quite grown used to, and that was the color of his eyes. They were steel-gray. The effect of those steel-gray eyes, in conjunction with long, straight black hair and a swart complexion, though it was not any darker than an Arab's, was a startling one. It made me think of some miscegenated Berserk.

And the man himself was an impenetrable enigma. He was certainly not an Arab. Neither was he of the negroid stock, nor of any African race I knew. His skin was not much darker than my own.

Any European race, if subjected for five or six centuries to the burning sun of the tropics, would probably darken to that shade in the long run. It was neither the deep copper-brown hue of the Bantu nor the lighter, cigar-wrapper color of the highland African and the Galla; in fact, it was unlike that of any native I ever saw. There was a smooth light-bronze sheen to it that calls vividly to mind the complexions of the Japanese, as I remember them.

For the rest, he had a very keen, intelligent face of a martial cast, and his steel-gray eyes were like a hawk's for brightness. Apparently he was about thirty years of age. At a good running guess he was at least a foot taller than the stature of an average man, and of tremendously powerful build, with a great chest and arms capable of wielding the hammer of Thor.

When I ran across him, he had been living among the Swahilis—a bastard Arab race who had overrun a great part of East Africa. He had served too, by his own story, among the Arab slave-raiders, the ruthless breed of Tippoo Tib, who recruited their fighting men plausibly enough, as honest traders of ivory—and let them discover their red profession later.

Digitized by Google

He had drifted down from Uganda; had lived for a while at a *kraal* on the Zambezi; to which point, again, he had migrated by degrees from Heaven knew where. But among all these people his chronic unrest and roving ways had earned for him the significant nickname of the "Wanderer." And a wanderer he was.

So much for the man's strange personnel. But tonight the suddenness of his appearance had upset me a trifle as he stood there tall and grim in the moonlight.

"What's up, Ingulfa?" I rapped out.

Ingulfa grinned. He was not a person who grinned very often, but I could see him grinning away prodigiously in the bright moonlight. His cavernously grinning jaws suddenly snapped together, then opened again. His voice was a vibrant rumble, keyed low.

"*Effendi,*" he mumbled, "look to yourself! There is one within who has crossed the seas to seek you. Ah, he is a player of ghostly music, this stranger, and between whiles he swears a great deal because you have been so late in coming. A mad fellow, yet he has a look of wisdom. He has brought some strange things: a great two-handed sword—*aho!* Aye, and a thing that mutters in its sleep. . . . Hark, there he is playing again!"

I listened mystified. Weird strains of wailing music drifted faintly across the courtyard—a strange saturnalia of lost chords. Ghostly and faint, like an echo of the past, that mad music had a familiar ring. Where had I heard it before?

WITHOUT stopping to rack my memory for the answer, I threw the reins to Ingulfa and mounted swiftly to my rooms, which lay in a wing at the back of that rambling old house. And there in the middle of the room, his feet cocked up on the table, his hands working away at the stops of a very ghastly set of dilapidated Scottish bagpipes with which he was busied in making the night hideous—the tune was *The Laird of Cockpen*—sat my cousin and only kinsman left alive on top of the earth—Mr. Sheridan Severn, barrister-at-law!

I remembered very well that he had no business to be in Africa; and the family reasons back of it all. His proper place was in England hammering away at his law books.

His people had been high-grade, middle-class west-of-England folks; none of your high-flying sort, but improvident; a trifle live-as-you-go; they had left him next to nothing. When he had been orphaned at a wretchedly early age and tossed out in the great world unprovided for, he had come out to live with us in the new colony, dropping into our lives quite as a matter of course, at Port Natal.

It was my father's will that one of us should take up the law as a profession, and my mother had voiced the same wish many times during her lifetime. They had harped upon that one string till it became an old story to me.

I hated the sight of barristers' robes, with the dry, musty atmosphere of courtrooms. I wanted to be free. Naturally its fulfilment had devolved upon "Sherry." So he had gone. I believe he had managed to scrape through the University with something or other in his possession that passed for a degree, but of exactly what sort I was not informed. Whether he had ever been able to take chambers for himself I had not since learned. But just then he happened to look up and caught sight of me standing in the door.

He got up slowly and came toward me with a flushed face. For an instant we stared in silence into each other's eyes, and the next second we were pumping away across the gulf of years.

"You young dog!" I cried. "You here, when you ought to be in England! What does it mean, young 'un? That you have kicked over the traces, I daresay? The old strain of the Severns, my boy; it runs in the blood! Aside from that you've sprung up like a mushroom, I can see. Why, you look as fit as a prize-fighter, and you're all of fourteen stone!"

"I'm a bit too soft for prize-fighting, but sound as a Berkshire porker," he grinned. "And you too have changed. . . . You've grown to be a handsome pirate, Alan, though I suppose I shouldn't say it to your face. I've known some women foolish enough to fall in love with your sort, while you're an inch too tall to suit me. We shall be styled the 'long and short of it,' I fancy."

I looked at him, almost dazed. The last time I had seen him, he was a pale, slender youngster of nineteen, standing with a hopeless look in his eyes in the gangway of the *Connaught Castle*, outbound for England. I remember chiefly that he had wrung my

Digitized by Google

hand convulsively without uttering a word of farewell.

That was a strange parting. But the pent-up grief in his heart had mastered him and he was actually stricken dumb. But he had cause enough. He was being packed off to England to get an education. What was more, he had come on straight to the steamer from my mother's newly sodded grave.

That was six years before.

And now at twenty-five he was a well set-up young fellow, small-boned but beautifully muscled, with as fine a chest as you will find in a day's journey, and a biceps you could see playing beneath his coatsleeve when he moved his arm. He was not so tall as might be, but very compactly proportioned; he had wavy dark hair, blue eyes with a glint of gray, and a clean English face. Altogether he was worth while looking at.

"And now," I said, "perhaps you will be good enough to explain where you came from?"

"Came up from the Cape in the old *Achilles*," he answered. "Disembarked at Durban, of course, and came on here, hoping I should find you. Beastly train. . . . Fellow at the Rand Club knew your direction, but was cocksure you had trekked off up-country; and being an accommodating beggar, he drove me out in his beastly 'spider.' But I say, old fellow, magnificent piece of statuary that! He looks like Ajax in bronze!"

He pointed at Ingulfa.

"Where did you get *him?*" he asked with another stare.

"Never mind him just now," I said, "but let me have the whole story. Out with it, my lad."

"Right," he said, sitting down again and recocking his feet. "But first permit me to suggest that I'm still gagging on the reek of that blessed train. Man can't talk with a throat like a penny whistle. I hope you don't call this your usual form, when welcoming a long-lost kinsman!"

"There is some Cape Smoke," I suggested.

"Trot it out," he shuddered.

I found the Cape brandy, steering warily through the amazing litter of his luggage strewn about the floor. A huge bag of golf-sticks lay jumbled with gun-cases, boxes, and a weird little Berliner gramophone, whose frozen drone had startled Ingulfa.

Hard by lay an object which caused me to pull up short and stare at it with open-minded suspicion. It was a long two-handed Scottish claymore; and Heaven only knew where it had come from and how many men's blood its grim blade had drunk in its forgotten past!

He had always gone in for relics—particularly the warlike kind. I remembered very lucidly how in attempting to discharge an ancient firearm, which had belonged to a famous highwayman who was duly hanged for his crimes, he had narrowly missed blowing me to kingdom-come, for the thing had burst from the effects of the heavy charge. So I took care to make a wary detour around that sinister relic of bygone battles, which lay quite naked on the floor, for most of Sherry's curios had developed diabolical proclivities.

"Hung out my shingle all fair enough," he said over the top of his tumbler, "and stuck to my bally ten-by-eight for weeks on end—but no one ever came. Unique experience, 'pon my honor! It made me think I needed a change of pasture, as the poet insinuates, so I've come back to Africa. Still sport the same old shingle." And he pointed to an oblong piece of japanned tin nailed to the lid of one of his boxes. It bore the legend:

MR. SHERIDAN SEVERN
Counselor and Barrister-at-Law

"I'll hang it up again out here," he sighed. "Not overly many sharks of my kidney adrift here just now, I fancy?"

"An error in the log," I amended. "You'll find plenty of sharks in these waters, my lad—schools of 'em. They'll eat you at sight, as they've eaten everything else. But let that pass. You are here, old fellow; that's enough for me. Now have you got any money?"

For answer he pulled out a bulging wallet.

"There is six hundred pounds in that wad. Mark that little word—wad. Only had a fifty-pound note in the world when I hit the saloon deck of the *Achilles*. Note that expression, hit; Yankee slang for 'arrive.' Behold, I have made a killing—ah! I see you are beginning to observe the red-blooded novelty of my flow of speech. Plagiarisms! Got them off a party of Americans coming up from the Cape. I had

Digitized by Google

opined that mere language was a hackneyed convention until I met those Americans! I've changed my views; it is a joy forever. But that wasn't all, Alan!"

Abruptly with a juggling gesture he tossed the wallet ceilingward. It fell back solidly in the center of the table and burst open. A little stream of broad golden eagles slid out chinking. Banknotes, bulked into a disrespectful pulp, protruded cheerfully.

"No," he said, "that wasn't all!"

His eyes had narrowed as if, in that brief instant, he had seen behind the solid door of the present that shut him in.

"Alan, I met *the* woman—the one, I mean, that I am going to care for—where I got the plagiarisms and the six hundred pounds."

My eyes bulged as I got up and gasped feebly, "But how the deuce——"

He waved me down.

"NOW don't cut in on this, Alan, old chap. Where was I? Ah, yes, on the saloon deck of the *Achilles!* It was raining big guns when I went on board at Cape Town after transshipping from the Union Castle steamer. I shouldn't have minded the rain, you know, only the wind was blowing half a gale on deck, so I strolled down below for a smoke. There I presently got in the way of speaking to some American globe-trotters bound for the Mozambique Channel. There were three men in the party besides two ladies—regular stunners they were, but more especially the younger one, who struck me as altogether too handsome to be comfortable. I found out that they were going across to Madagascar to do Queen Ranavalona and her dusky court, which is the biggest order in the globe-trotting game.

"Meantime the weather stayed bad; in fact it rained and blew all the time coming up, and I soon got well acquainted with the saloon deck. It wasn't long before my Yankee friends took up the matter of my education. It began with a thing they called a mint julep, and ended with my being initiated into the great American game of poker. I wasn't so keen to play, but they made a great favor of my joining them; said the game was no good three-handed, and wouldn't I sit in to oblige? Naturally, I hated to seem a bounder. I hadn't a pea-green notion of the game, but there was a reason amidships making it impolitic to decline. If you care to know, the Reason wore skirts— so I sat in.

"And an odd game it was. Once you began, you simply couldn't stop. You wouldn't if you could, you know. There was one old chap who seemed to be the king bee of the lot. 'Majah Buckerton, from old Kentuck, suh!' He raised tobacco somewhere in the States. I could see with one eye shut that he had a habit of raising things, for he raised the pot with surprising regularity. They called them 'pots,' you know. Now a pot is mostly open, isn't it? But these pots were different; they had metaphorical lids, and one had to open them. There were things I didn't quite take in. After you opened them, you raised them. The Major mostly looked after that. I asked him if there was any limit to that sort of thing. He said, 'The limit, suh, is the ceiling!' That was another thing I didn't quite grasp. But I opened a good many pots myself, and as luck would have it, invariably won. It seemed as if I couldn't lose.

"The pile of notes and gold in front of me kept getting bigger, and meanwhile the old Major kept getting madder. But by this time my blood was up. At last I got an opportunity to open the biggest stakes of all, and the Major, as usual, began to shovel in banknotes, saying that he raised me. I had an odd sort of hand but I 'stayed,' as they called it—queer expression that, for I was there all the time—and then I pushed in some more money and asked the Major how many cards he needed. He said he guessed that what he had would do him pretty well; anyhow he would keep 'em. I took one card myself and made another bet of fifty pounds. Then the old Major looks at me sort of pityingly out of the tail of his eye, and says:

" 'My boy, I don't like to bump you too strong, but to me, suh, you represent the British lion, and therefaw I shall twist yo' tail. For the honor of old Kentuck, suh, I am compelled to raise you one thousand dollars!' And he shoveled in the money!

"I just pushed in all the notes in front of me—and a jolly pile they were—and asked the Major to show his hand. I knew it would be a stunner, but there was really nothing else to be done.

" 'Three aces with a pair of kings, suh!' says he, laying them down on the table with

Digitized by Google

their faces up. 'I suppose you have me beaten then, Major,' says I, 'for I've only two pairs.' He began to rake in the money, and my precious fifty-pound-note with it. 'Live and learn, my son!' There was a general laugh. I stared at him slowly across the table. 'Oddly enough,' says I, 'they're all knaves—four knaves.'

" 'Four knaves!' suddenly says the Major, quite staggered. 'Four *what?*' 'Four knaves,' I said, 'and had them all the time, by Jove.' I laid them down face up on the table. Then the old Major let go of those banknotes as if they burned his fingers. 'Gentlemen,' says he, 'there are five Jacks here—I am the fifth! And I take this opportunity to apologize for my bray. Take your money, young man; you have won—won, don't you understand? . . . Take it; it's yours! Gentlemen, there is no fool like an old fool!'

"It was all theatric. Somehow it didn't seem right. I said, 'Major, so far as I am concerned, this is all a mistake. I don't want this money; it isn't mine. Will you take it back?' He cut me off like a flash. 'From another, suh,' he said icily, 'your offer might be an insult. Say no more. Take what is your right, suh; you have won it fairly.' One of the other men spoke up. 'Take it, Johnny Bull, and don't lose any sleep over it. It's only a Jack-pot from old Kentuck!' Then they all laughed like mad.

"I raked it in.

" 'Will you drink a mint julep with us, suh?' the Major asked. I said I would. When it was all over we went in to breakfast. That evening as I stood by the rail, the handsome lady came up to me, and gave me a lovely smile. 'Mr. Severn,' says she, 'you have put a crimp in the Major that he isn't likely to forget in a hurry, which means that you have rendered us all a service. He needed it, you see, and now he'll be good. Take my advice, forget the great American game; it's bad medicine. You may come and talk to me instead, if you wish, for I imagine the men find your society expensive.'

"I took her at her word, and the next day but one we anchored in Durban Roads. We said good-by—I had sat by that girl in a trance for two whole days—and I came ashore; but before we parted, in the upshot, she gave me a word of hope. 'We're coming back,' she said, 'to do the diamond fields. Don't forget——'

" 'Forget!' I whispered to her. 'When the stars go out and the sea dries up—then I'll forget!' I went over the side. She looked back at me and smiled. It haunts me, that smile, as no smile ever did! Forget!" He broke off abruptly. "When they come back——"

"They never will," I said unfeelingly; "they never do. But let me at least congratulate you on being a fool for luck." I picked up the wallet as I spoke. "As for this, it had better be placed in safety until we decide what is to be done now that you are here in Africa. For the present, what do you say to having a go at lions for a month or so up-country?"

His face lit up with pleasure.

"As my Yankee friends would put it," he cried, dropping his heels to the floor with a crash that made the glasses rattle again, "I'm your cockleburr! I suppose Ajax there goes with us? When shall we trek?"

"At dawn," I answered; and just then Ingulfa glided out of the room at the lowing of oxen from the rear. At the threshold he turned and faced us, and the lamplight, flaring up brightly with the draft of the open door, threw his great form and martial face into strong relief. Then the door closed behind him.

CHAPTER IV

INGULF THE SECOND

WHY one man looks into another's eyes and quails, or what he sees there, who can say? It is one of life's paradoxes that one man is a walking riddle, another an open page.

Ingulfa's weird personality left a remarkable impression upon people who saw him for the first time. His singularity was mystery; and the glamour of his mystery hung over him like an invisible ægis. I had seen men stop and gulp in wonder when he had come suddenly into the room; yet I was unprepared for the look of intense curiosity, almost of fear, that crept into Sherry's eyes as the door closed behind him.

"Man," he said, "where did you get that big bronze devil? Who is he, what is he, and where did he come from? I have my reasons for asking," he added. "As you may recall, ethnography happens to be a hobby of mine—the races and lairs of men. You may smile as much as you like, but I

Digitized by Google

don't believe that man is any more a native than you or I!"

He paused.

"There is another reason," he said. "He reminds me of a queer yarn I heard from a scientific London friend of mine who is a famous linguist and an inveterate globe-trotter, something he got out of the old Norse Sagas. I will explain what that was by and by. But be kind enough to tell me what African race that person belongs to?"

"I can't tell you that," I answered, "for I don't know. I can tell you where I ran across him. He answers to the name of Ingulfa."

He gave a start.

"Just say that again."

I complied, rather mystified.

"So that's his blooming name—'Ingulfa!' Well, it tallies . . . 'Ingulf-a!' " he reëchoed, hyphenating the word. "Are you getting your grappling-irons on to that hyphen?" he asked significantly. "Now be good enough to hand me Dougall MacDougall's claymore which you will find just back of your chair. I have it in my mind that I shall part company with it forever in the next quarter of an hour," and he sighed.

I hastily moved my chair and picked up the claymore, though what he meant to do with it was beyond me. But out of sheer curiosity I had another look at it. At a glance I saw it was the familiar type of Scottish broadsword commonly known as "two-handed."

It was a long, formidable-looking weapon, and as sharp as the day it came from the forge. Whoever it was that tempered the steel had been a master of his craft. The scabbard was badly dinted and worn, but had once been handsome, being hung on a broad leather belt by fine steel chains. The blade of the weapon itself was made of the very best steel, beautifully damascened, although it bore so far as I could see no mark of the maker. It was double-edged, very long and broad, and so heavy as to appear rather ponderous and unwieldy; but in the right hand looked capable of dealing great blows and withstanding almost any strain. Obviously, it was made about the time of Wallace or Bruce for some champion of uncommon stature and strength, for no one else could have wielded such a weapon.

"Who was Dougall MacDougall?" I asked.

"A swashbuckling chap who lived four hundred years ago and died with his boots on," he replied abstractedly. "He killed six bold English knights with that sword at the battle of Flodden Field; but at last an English archer in the army of the Earl of Surrey laid him low with a cloth-yard shaft. But I am ready to listen now, so fire away. Where was it you ran across your henchman with the hyphenated name?"

"Well," I began, "it was while I was shooting with Lord Melton near the Zambezi Falls." And I went on to tell him how one day we had got in the wake of the Arab slave-raiders who made that region a human hell. For once they met their match when a Matabele Impi, who were out on a cattle-lifting foray of their own, had attacked their camp at dawn. The Matabele had evidently outnumbered them tremendously—it was "dog eat dog." In the sanguinary fray that followed, this man Ingulfa had been left for dead on the field. Like the Matabele and the Swahili mercenaries, he had fought with the spear. He had fought on the losing side; unheeded and ignorant of that ignoble cause.

"The slavers had died hard—each man lying stark and still in the center of a knot of dead foes on the hill-top where they made their last stand. As I gazed down wonderingly at this other Hereward, only in bronze, lying all caked with a bloody grime—hopeless; with a ring of dead men all around him, and slowly ebbing his life away through a great gaping hole in his chest, though it may seem like a Quixotic thing to say, I could not leave him alone to die. So I drove away the vultures that were beginning to grow bold by now, and had him carried to the wagon where he could die at least in peace. But as the poor devil appeared to die hard, I resolved to try my hand at some impromptu surgery. So I washed out the wound as well as I could, and sewed it up myself after a fashion.

"The day wore through, and he had not died yet. At nightfall I put on fresh bandages and added a healing infusion made from a stunted herb which grows wild on the veld and is useful to apply to cuts and wounds. An old witch-wife at Secombo's *kraal* had told me that weed would cure anybody but a dead body, and she may have been in the right about it, for to my amazement he began to mend. In the upshot his magnificent constitution pulled him through.

Digitized by Google

"When the time came to trek down to the coast, I told him that he might return to his own *kraal* whenever he was ready, but he merely saluted in silence.

" 'What is it?' I asked him.

" 'Englishman,' he said in short, soldierly fashion, 'the war-dogs left me on the field. You found me and healed my hurt. Henceforth I fight your battles, not mine. Look you, I am an eagle who has lost his aerie, and a stranger from another time. Men call me the Wanderer, and I am a wanderer indeed! These Swahili are not of my race, though I fought for them because fighting is a man's game. And so I wander on till I find what I seek. Where will the road end that I must follow? *Effendi*, I don't know—but I will wander a while in your shadow.'

" 'The deuce you will!' I said. But I caved in, for the man's strange trick of speech, which was so utterly unlike that of all the natives I had ever heard, had taken me very much aback."

"Precisely!" Sherry put in. "It must have taken any one aback, except some chap like Kipling, who sees into the insides of men's souls but has lost track of the year. And now have you noticed his eyes?"

"I have, and I expected that question."

"Well, what do you make of them?"

"I don't know. I am all at sea. They are certainly not like any native's eyes. But suppose you question him in person. If I am not mistaken—he walks light for so big a man—he is coming down the corridor."

I was right, for at this moment Ingulfa glided into the room.

"Listen, Ingulfa," I said, "this man is of my father's house. When you fight his foes you fight mine. He comes from a great city yonder across the water where men make many books and put into them the records of men's deeds and the faces of many nations. And so they judge the race by the deeds and faces. He wants to know from what stock you spring?"

A light of understanding flashed across Ingulfa's martial face.

"Tell him," he said, "that I am of a race as proud as his own."

"But what race is that, Ingulfa?"

"A race that came out of the North in ships when the world was young. But if I ever heard their name it has gone from my memory. That is all I know, Englishmen."

"Ah!" said Sherry with a singular smile, "let us try an experiment, a little bizarre, to be sure, but not so new that it has not been used before. Man, this thing is big—bigger than I thought."

IT WAS big. To this day I remember the attitudes of those two: Ingulfa standing arrested at the threshold, flashing his steel-gray eyes from one to the other of us in his inscrutable way; and facing him, his chair tilted to the wall, Sherry sitting with the great sword across his knees. He had the air of having something up his sleeve, something preposterously simple. I can recall their very facial expressions; the shadows, the light of the flaring oil lamp that flickered on that gleaming blade, on the blued metal of a rack of guns on the wall, on the amazing jumbled miscellany of rubbish littered all over the room. The place was like some backstairs London curio-shop in Cheapside.

"Now tell him this. In the other land men laugh at a fighting-man who is armed with a plaything like the spear. I have brought him a better weapon from across the seas," and he tapped the broadsword meaningly.

Rising, he sheathed the claymore and abruptly handed it to Ingulfa with a graphic gesture.

"I give it to you," he said, "to have and to hold forever!"

"Now watch results," he whispered *sotto voce.*

I watched and saw Ingulfa, like a man in a daze, step back a pace and mechanically slide his hand down over the hilt of his new weapon—saw his fingers grip and tighten, and saw his face begin to work. I never saw anything quite like the light that came into his eyes in that moment, and yet it was no evil glitter. I marked him kiss the cold blade like one who has come into his own. He began to brandish the murderous-looking thing above his head.

It was a sinister sight, and yet there was something inspiriting in the way he did it all. Suddenly he broke off and began to mutter. I listened, for this thing of making a man feel his past—no, not even his own past but the past of his ancestors, was beginning to fascinate me tremendously. But it was all in some barbaric jargon that was utterly incomprehensible to me. Somehow it sounded strangely like a chant.

Digitized by Google

"You have touched the Lost Chord," I said.

"Hush!" he answered warningly. "Let it vibrate!"

Ingulfa had glided abruptly into the Swahili tongue and I pricked up my ears.

"A man's tool!" he muttered; "he is right. Tell him I accept the gift—" and his voice rose—"a wizard's gift, a great gift, a gladdener of vultures, feeder of hyenas, mightiest of weapons my eyes have ever seen! Hail to the Skull-biter!" he cried suddenly, his voice rising like a trumpet-blare. "Hail to you, Destroyer, forged long ago by enchanters from across the seas! Death rides on your glittering wing; where you bite, skeletons shall lie bleaching in the sun! Now I am a man once more! Aho! It shall drink deep; it shall drink deep!"

"Now what on earth is he saying?" asked Sherry, grinning triumphantly. "Why, it sounds for all the world like a Viking's chant!"

Then a great light dawned on me.

"A Viking's chant it is," I said, "and he is a sort of lost Viking himself, or a wonderfully good imitation. All he lacks is a ship. But you—you are a clever young devil, and you have made me see things."

"But what was that he was chanting?"

"He has been christening his new plaything as you expected he would, with a string of pet names pleasantly suggestive of a charnel-house. Rely upon it, he would not trade that butcher's tool for a barrel of diamonds; and what is more to the point, you have builded better than you knew. If ever he can stand between you and fate he will do it."

"Well, I may give him the chance some day. Let us be sure we hold the true key to the cipher. Suppose you ask him to favor us with another little speech—in the other tongue."

I complied, and Ingulfa began speaking, or rather chanting something in the same barbaric jargon we had heard before, but he broke off abruptly at the fourth line, as if his memory failed him.

"Ask him now what that means."

I asked accordingly.

"He says it means this:

"I am a landless one;
Reiver and Wanderer,
Homeless and masterless;
We are Sons of the Sea . . . "

Sherry rose to his feet.

"Let us put off the mask," he said. "That man is a Viking, or the son of a Viking, and his name is Ingulf, not 'Ingulfa.' The latter is only a corruption of a good old Norse name, an Africanism so to speak. That is where the hyphen comes in. And that tongue he has just been babbling is in all probability archaic Scandinavian!"

I sat up and gasped.

"I have heard," I said, "of a gentleman of fiction named Dupin who unraveled some tall problems, but in my humble opinion Dupin was a fool to you. And now, since you have floated me clean off ground, perhaps you will explain how our Viking comes to be living in Africa, with an African tailpiece to his name?"

"That," he replied, "leads us to the other land—to my globe-trotting London friend and to the Saga of Ull the Old."

"The 'Saga of Ull the Old,' " I repeated in wonder; "who in the Lord Harry was he?"

"You shall hear," he said, unlocking a black despatch-box which contained his degrees, and presently bringing to light a paper covered with writing in an extraordinarily crabbed hand.

"Here is a good translation of that amazing fragment which Dr. Eric Ivarsson has obligingly set down with his own learned hand, for I was much taken up with the matter at the time. Fortunately, I have preserved it. The original writing has been placed in the British Museum by my friend who, by the way, carries about half of the alphabet after his name. But as that gentleman's precious script is a shining example of the illegible—like that of most geniuses—I had best read it aloud."

He began accordingly:

"I, Ull the Old, the son of Eyulf, the son of Eric Longspear, write of these things whereof my knowledge is that of him who has seen. In this my 'Say' [Saga] I set down what befell those who followed the whale's path, four long ships and many renowned Berserks under leadership of Ingulf Blackhair. Ill-fated was that voyage, for of all who sailed but nineteen men are home, of whom I, Ull [etc., etc.], am one. For, hearing from certain seafaring men of Krit [the island of Crete] that the Varangers, whom we had hoped to join, were disbanded and scattered to the four winds, we turned back and fell to ravaging the coast of Ethiopia. There we got much booty, with certain white female slaves that fell to the share of our leaders, and fought a great fight with an Ethiopian army which came against us, wherein we had the best of it, escaping seaward with small loss.

"Odin sent a storm; it drove the ships on to the rocks, where they broke up. Now having no ships

Digitized by Google

and being cut off to the north by the Ethiopian army, we marched southward across the narrow neck of the two seas, and seized there some ships of the Arabian, killing the crews to a man. We ran south on that sea [the Red Sea?] before heavy gales. In the outcome, being new to those waters and the vessels we had seized being of a pattern unfamiliar to our seamen, we were washed in and ground to pieces. Some perished there, but most came safely off to land. Seeing no escape by water, we turned inland, seeking some other outlet, until in time, wearied of wandering, we came to a fine fertile country ringed in by great mountains, and here settled, taking as many wives as we listed from among the women of the Blacks.

"Of these mountains there is one that vomits smoke and has from afar off the semblance of a monstrous Skull. Two years I dwelled in the shadow of Skull-Mountain; but in the end I with some few others, a ship's crew in all, hungering for the sea, parted from our companions and marched down to the coast, which journey occupied the third of a year. There we built a seaworthy vessel of the wreckage that was washed in——"

Here he came to a full stop.

"Another March of the Ten Thousand," I put in. "Our old friends, Xenophon & Company, with a new libretto."

But he made no reply. He was staring moodily at nothing, with a very blank look on his face.

"Go on," I said, much interested; but he had sprung up and was striding to and fro scross the floor, almost wringing his hands. Coming back abruptly to the table, he thrust the writing under my nose.

"See for yourself!"

The Saga broke off short, leaving everything in the dark.

At the bottom was the date of the translation, August 6, 1893, and the translator's half illegible initials—E. I. That was all, with the exception of a short quotation from an old Norman romance, scrawled in the upper left-hand margin in the same crabbed hand. It ran:

Est fuga, volvitur rota,
On we drift: where looms the dim port?
—Hugues of Saxe-Gotha.

"ACCORDING to my learned friend," he said, "whose name adorns the title-page of several notable monographs on the Norse Literature, that was the extent of his find. He never found the other half of the Saga. An unrecorded landshift had buried the galleries which ran below the ancient tumuli under a mass of débris that blocked the way of any further search. 'The remainder is lost to the world!' That was how he put it. 'It seems incredible to most people,' he had said to me back there in the smoke and fog of London, 'that the Vikings could have made their way into Africa; but in point of fact, history proves that they visited Africa repeatedly even at a very remote period,' and then he wound up pat with a passage he had bagged from the Latin of Eumenius*, telling how a band of sea-kings who had made a landing upon the Libyan coast near ancient Carthage, had been driven back to their ships by the Carthaginians coming up. That was in the year 300 A.D. The man was a perfect mine of information. He told me all about the Varangians, and Mikligard —that was Constantinople—and the Greek emperors; and he fixed the date of Ull's voyage in the thirteenth century, which he says was the time the Varangian Guard disbanded. 'The coast of the Dark Continent,' he chirped into my ear, 'was well known to the Norse sea-rovers!' "

"But what did he say became of 'Ingulf Blackhair'? " I asked. Before Sherry could reply, there came a strange interruption.

"He stayed!" a deep voice muttered behind me, "and built a kingdom. He stayed; ay, and I with him! We made war; and we slew, we slew——"

I craned my head around, and there was Ingulf, to give him his right name, whose presence we had forgotten absolutely, mumbling like a ghost in a play. It never struck me as odd that he was gabbling away in English, for he spoke it well enough when he chose. He made blood-curdling gestures. I was seized with awe. What did he know of the other Ingulf, that 'Ingulf Blackhair' who had set sail for Constantinople more than six centuries before? The old creed of the East flashed into my brain. Was he Ingulf's reincarnation? He gabbled mostly to himself. There was a dreadful realism about it all.

"By the Mountain of the Skull! The accursed priests! The Ethiopians—— Aho! the Black Men came rolling up like the seawaves. We broke them—so. Ah, we broke them, and then we slew! Who calls to Ingulf, Ingulf the Wanderer, Ingulf the Berserk, Ingulf Blackhair? He is dead! I saw him die in battle—I saw—or was it I?"

He swept his hand over his forehead with a gesture of immense despair; his voice died away to a mere rattle. An appalling shudder shook him. The dead glare in his eyes

*Eumenius: Panegyr., XVIII.

Digitized by Google

was awful. I was struck with horror. I thought he would fall, when all at once, amazingly, he pulled himself together and glided out of the room.

When he was gone Sherry burst out—

"Man, I believe he was *there!*"

He began to mop his face nervously in a most unbarrister-like way. Then in a gasp—

"Great Heavens, what is that man?"

"I give it up," I said. "The old sea-king's descendant, or else——"

I shivered.

"Remember the writing speaks of 'certain white female slaves.'"

The pale glow of the dawn was streaming through the windows as we rose. A brand-new day was being heralded by the muffled beat of the Bonanza stamps, falling on the morning's peace like the roll of muttered thunder. An ox began to low from some out-houses in the rear—it seemed to come from miles away—reminding me that it was time for many things that were urgent, for many perils; for trek-oxen, gun-bearers, wild sounds, and naked men; for rivers and the burning glare of deserts; for mountains that never seemed any nearer, though you journeyed today and tomorrow; for adventure, toil, thirst, fever; for gold to be earned or lost, for life to be staked again and kept, or thrown away.

It was time to "trek."

CHAPTER V

THE "NEW JERUSALEM"

ALL TREKS come to an end prefigured, even the little trek that is life. For Duval the two had ended together, and we had left him there in his lonely grave up-country, with a grim stone monolith keeping a long ward over his bones.

Some eleven weeks from that evil time found us back again on the Rand. After drawing up a joint statement of the manner of his passing to a better world—and a harrowing document was that—and having duly taken oath of its truth, we went straight from the magistrate's office to the grimy den of the *Johannesburg Star* and told a tale which caused the hollow-jowled editor to sit up and write things with headlines. After that we repaired to the cable offices and sent off this message:

TO THE MARQUIS DE ROQUEMORT, PARIS:
René Duval was killed by a lion in Khama's country, January first. Remains buried on the spot. Cable disposition of effects. ALAN SEVERN.

Afterward we betook ourselves to the Rand Club, to sip consoling liquids and to overlook upon the cosmopolitan human tide which washes through the streets of the latter-day Jerusalem of gold. A carriage was passing by at the moment, drawn by a pair of striking grays in silver-mounted harness, and conveying two ladies—of apparel Worthian and unobtrusively fetching; of faces serenely radiant. In that day of the ubiquitous "spider," an out-and-out carriage, while by no means an unknown sight in the streets of the big gold town, was still a thing sufficiently uncommon; but this telling equipage was the focus of every stare.

It was Johannesburg's not too delicate tribute to beauty; a pardonable form of flattery, since that pair of beauties might have been safely backed to draw a stare in a London crowd. One was a superb statuesque creature of dazzling bright hair and pink-and-white complexion, nobly coiffured, worthily begowned, a composite of Paris *chic*, British poise, and Yankee self-assertiveness, with emphasis on the last; the other—Norma!

"Norma!" The name had burst involuntarily from my lips as I bent forward, staring. But she had not seen me; her eyes were fixed upon something at the horse's heads: a naked Kaffir urchin who had narrowly missed going under those iron-shod hoofs in an ill-advised scurry across the street. All I caught was a glimpse of a well-remembered profile. But to my intense surprise, the bright-haired lady, whom I had never seen before, looked up and bowed with precision.

Sudden enlightenment was vouchsafed from Sherry. He had risen and was beaming rapturously upon the blonde goddess in the carriage, coupling recognition with the delighted avowal—

"My Angel from 'old Kentucky'!"

We bowed together. Both ladies were nodding and smiling. The carriage had stopped, and the Angel was unmistakably beckoning, at which we beamed in unison and strolled down, leaving green-eyed envy writ large upon the faces of a little coterie of smokers strung along the balcony. We passed them with preternatural unconcern, conscious of a secret fear that the enchanted vehicle would evaporate. But it stood by its guns, grays pawing and coachman

Digitized by Google

sawing, as we found when we emerged upon the street.

The riddle of the bright-haired divinity's presence was quickly solved when Norma informed us succinctly:

"We are old acquaintances, you know. It was Paris of course—we met there. Miss Buckerton's trip to the Wonderful Isle has made her ill, and she is staying here with me to recuperate. The others have gone on to Kimberley."

"Bless me, now!" said Sherry. "A most remarkable-looking invalid!"

Both ladies laughed.

"She is convalescent." And Norma turned to me. "So you are back at last from the 'unforeseen'? "

"*We* are," I said significantly; "that is to say, we two. One of us—stayed. There was a lioness——"

The other two were swimming in seas of chatter.

She looked at me very gravely; a searching look, for all that her eyes had softened with womanly commiseration.

"That is not good to hear," she said. "And it was René Duval who stayed? I had met him and I am very sorry. Forgive me if I ask the eternal question, 'whose fault was it'? "

I bit back the answer, "his own," which had trembled on the tip of my tongue and replied instead:

"I can not say. It was a deplorable accident."

"I should like to hear that story," she said simply. "Can you bring your cousin and dine with us tomorrow? Don't refuse; your lioness has become a very dreadful anticipation."

"It is impossible to refuse."

Subconsciously, I heard Sherry saying to the Angel:

"And how did you find her Majesty, Queen Ranavalona III.?"

Her answer was characteristic.

"Quite as usual, thank you, suffering with her coffee complexion."

"And her royal Consort and Grand Vizier, all rolled in one?"

The Angel scored again in her rippling drawl.

"A 'dark gentleman' in resplendent attire who gabbled his polite nigger-French and ogled a great ogle!"

"So the 'king' ogled?" he said, amused. "Well, I can't say that I blame him much. At least, the beggar showed taste. A cat may look at a queen, and even a Hova will blink upon occasion at a great white light. Yon vizierman has my ungrudged sympathy, let him be blood-brother to the Ace of Spades! But doubtless there are further details? May I ask when I shall be permitted to hear them?"

But the Angel turned to Norma and their eyes met in a rapid telepathic exchange. No spoken word passed between them; yet she bent over to him again and murmured clearly—

"That—is arranged."

He laughed; the answer was so quietly naive.

"Then it was witchcraft!" he threw back. But she smiled dimissal.

The carriage vanished upon the uneven tenor of its way, and we sauntered back to our balcony. We had booked our passage to a brand-new Elysium. Then the men at the farther end, most of whom I knew inconveniently well, swarmed down on us in a body, the green god visibly predominant in their faces. He in advance of their line, a cadaverous gentleman immaculately attired, was Tilstone, of the "Glencairn Deep;" and he opened fire remorselessly.

"It seems," was his first broadside, "that one must be a lion-killer to become a lion! No other need apply. Should he chance to be a person who has made a fortune in low-grade ores and tailings, the romantic fair one will have none of him on that count, or if he be one who has made two fortunes in a pinched-out reef she snubs him twice for that. In any case, he's a dead card. The moral is, get hence and pot lions!"

Tilstone made us an ironic bow.

"Would either of you chaps care to borrow any money—on your expectations?"

I saw my opportunity to draw his teeth and avert impending raillery, and I held up my hand.

"Gentlemen—" I quoth—"and Tilstone. Not so very long back, we left on the other side of the Limpopo River two things, a dead lioness and a dead man. Exactly twenty weeks ago, that man—a finer gentleman never lived—sat in this chair. . . . Which of you would care to sleep by his side tonight?"

We left a glum-faced group in possession of our empty chairs and went.

That conversation bore portentous fruit, for it is part of the scheme of life that little

Digitized by Google

things produce results in astonishing disproportion to their relative importance. A splendid dream had obsessed me, born of those chance words of Tilstone's, and lighting my thoughts like sunlit tracery gilding the most prosaic casements. Perhaps the light would die, the traceries flicker and go and the dream never come true. But Tilstone had made a fortune out of low-grade ores, and his half-mocking words had set me thinking. In Johannesburg all roads led to gold. And with gold, much gold, all things were possible, even the House of Raylescroft! Why should not we too take our share of this golden toll, in a land whose richness was a proverb?

"I wonder," I asked Sherry, "how much hard cash, if put to it, we could show between the pair of us?"

After a little reflection he answered—"You may put me down for a matter of six hundred pounds, say seven hundred if you choose to count my share of our little annuity, which as it chances falls due today for the quarter."

"And I," I supplemented, "can bring that up to a couple of thousands, not counting poor Duval's five hundred for the trip. We'll leave that out of the reckoning."

"Not so bad, after all," he remarked. "And now just what are you driving at?"

"Gold mines; something to make money fast."

"By all means let us make money fast. Shall we look over the market now or wait for something to turn up?"

"We'll begin today," I said. "It's no good waiting for things to turn up; they never turn up on time."

SOMETHING did turn up on the very next day. It was noised around the curb that a German Jew named Steinhardt, who was returning to the Fatherland in the matter of some estates, owned a valuable mine which he was forced to sell for a song. When this rumor got about, as such things will, we decided to look into it.

In front of the Stock Exchange we came upon Steinhardt himself, who was displaying to a lot of men some specimens of rich ore obtained from his mine. He was short and undersized, but upon his sloping shoulders was set an enormous head, the great, glistening pate perfectly bald save where a thin but kinky fringe of sparse iron-gray locks jutted out tragically at the sides. His nose was formed uncommonly like a great fish-hook, and the ends of his eyebrows slanted upward instead of curving down.

He made gloomy Hebraic gestures. Listening, we were informed that his property comprised a compact area of forty-eight claims in the South Village Extension, some five miles out of Johannesburg. The average mine on the Rand takes in at least one hundred claims, but this was quite as large a slice as we could think of attempting to digest with our limited capital. A shaft had already been sunk, it appeared from his talk, and boreholes put down to a depth of seven hundred feet; further than this the property had not been developed, but a quantity of working machinery would go with the mine, including a diamond-drill.

Old Steinhardt with his pronounced racial gestures reeled all this off monotonously, like a somnambulist. But ready cash was none too free in that knot of curb brokers, and he would take nothing else. Offers of scrip in many mines were temptingly dangled under his great hook nose. At these he laughed sardonically. We watched and listened to this extraordinary-looking personage for a brief while, and then catching his eye, I drew him aside from the press and bluntly inquired the price of the mine.

"Fifteen hoondert poundts," was the gloomy answer; "not a *pfennig* less! To Berlin I must go upon great matters, *Herr*, or I should sell it never—never at all. Fifteen hoondert poundts——"

"Too cursed much!" I said shortly, and had turned on my heel when a thought struck me. "Why are you leaving this country?" I asked suspiciously.

"*Herren*," he said, "an order of Fate! You think me a common Jew of the Transvaal, *nicht wahr?*" A look of gloomy disdain swept across his hawk face. "You think so—*hein?*"

He took a pace to the curb, swelled forth his chest like a pigeon, clicked his heels once, and wheeled short. Pride, triumph, contempt, came into his sardonic eyes.

"Listen: the Baron von Steinhardt, that was my father. My mother was a peasant—handsome! . . . I haf her portrait. A segret marriage—not published. *Die Dorfschulmeisterin.* . . . The eldest son. . . . Proofs! . . . I—the Baron by order of Fate! Fifteen hoondert poundts——"

"And beastly steep, to be sure," I broke

Digitized by Google

in, "but we'll have a peek into your shaft today."

With that we left him.

In two hours we were down in the shaft of the Jew's mine, marking with eyes that glittered the thin veins of dull yellow with which the reef was shot in places, like the veins in a man's arm. With the surface outcroppings they would have satisfied the most skeptical. After drawing apart for a whispered conference, from which old Steinhardt was brazenly frozen out, we decided that we must have the mine at all hazards.

"Look here," I said boldly to Steinhardt, "you want too much for your blooming sell, but we have decided to give you a thousand, and not a shilling more."

"A thousand!" he screamed; "you are *verrück*—crazy!"

I snapped my fingers at him.

"A thousand pounds; take it or leave it."

His jaw dropped in melancholy despair. He waved eloquent Hebraic palms at the shaft we had just left.

"Gott im Himmel!" he wailed, wagging his great head tragically to and fro; "what a barbarian! These English! . . . a price like that!" He was almost in tears. "And an order of Fate! A Baron! I—Steinhardt! . . ." He went on muttering: "Berlin! The Emperor! What shall I do? *Teufelsgeld!*"—he wrung his hands. With his lugubrious eyes, his fish-hook nose, his fringe of tragic hair, in his extravagant emotion he looked so ridiculous that I could have burst out laughing in his face. "Ah, Devilgold! . . ." It wasn't ludicrous to him.

Suddenly his head sunk down.

"God!" he mumbled, "today a poor Transvaaler Jew; tomorrow——"

He made two or three steps away from us, clicked his heels and drew himself up, with squared shoulders and swelling chest, and halted head.

"You shall take it for a thousand poundts!"

He fished from a capacious wallet a bill of sale in blank, and—shrewd old Shylock—a stylographic pen. He filled it in slowly and with immense deliberation, presenting a melancholy spectacle. While we were affixing our names he groaned horribly like one in pain. And afterward we cantered back to the city, stopping in Commissioner Street at the Bank of Africa where I drew out the money. Before paying it over we took a precaution. A notary's sign swinging above some windows had caught my eye; and here we entered and had the sale duly attested and a deed of the mine made out in our joint name.

Steinhardt gathered up the notes with one sweep of a long white hand, crushed them swiftly and spasmodically in his palm as one would crush a serpent, and gloomily prepared to depart.

"Stop a bit, my friend," I interposed. "It is not every day that one does business with a Baron. Shall we not adjourn elsewhere and crack a bottle to your future fortunes with the Emperor?"

But old Steinhardt, contemptuously declining our proffered cheer, turned away and rode off slowly on his sorry nag, shaking his head dolefully meanwhile and muttering into his beard. His hat having been removed while he mopped a perspiring brow, his enormous bald pate shone exactly like pink porcelainware in the beams of the westering sun.

We mounted and passed him at a hand-gallop. His great head was sunk over on his chest, and he did not look up. We never saw him again.

I GLANCED at my watch with a start of recollection; it was almost five o'clock, and we were due to dine at the Raylescrofts' at eight, a dozen miles away. It would be necessary to make for our lodgings first and get into some different clothes.

As we pulled up at the gate a Kaffir boy came forward with a yellow envelope bearing the seal of the cable-office.

"A writing for you, Baas," he grinned.

It proved to be the answer to our cable of yesterday.

ALAN SEVERN, JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICAN REPUBLIC—

Preserve effects of deceased until called for; no definite time.

RAOUL DE ROQUEMORT.

The cablegram was dated at Marseilles.

I tossed the messenger a shilling in reward for his patience.

"There is no answer," I told him, and he went off down the road, post-haste, doubtless making for some illicit drinking-place, for the Transvaal Kaffir is keen on the delights of "civilization."

We spent the next half hour in arraying ourselves in the customary black coat, white

Digitized by Google

waistcoat with pearl buttons, and tall white choker, which collectively embellish the South African diner-out—a costume to which the addition of spurs and riding-gaiters lent a pronounced air of Hyde Park on an April morning. In the tall glass we resembled nothing so much as a pair of miraculous black beetles with white bellies and yellow antennæ—our gaiters were a glaring tan. I remember smiling at that undignified illusion.

So we galloped away in the fading sunshine, forgetful of today's sordid stroke of luck and the cares of tomorrow. Life had all at once become transfigured by the prospect of so many infinitely desirable things awaiting us yonder—always a little way ahead—there in that enchanted mansion that, seeming no nearer than a castle on a far horizon in the dreams of our hopes, at length swept into view around a sudden turn of the road, all splendid in the red rays of sunset.

CHAPTER VI

LORD CROYDON CHALMES AND THE RAINBOW LADY

THE butler was bringing in the wine with his own fat pallid hands; blue-veined and podgy they were. He was a Frenchman—a Provençal, I believe; Rayles-croft had imported him with the wine. His abased, St. Bernard worship of his mistress wrote itself across my memory with every meaningless flutter of his fat white hands—it gave me a ridiculous pang of jealousy, like all the other idolaters! I had found her wonderful enough before with each little feminine readjustment of setting; but tonight she took my breath away in evening dress—a singular gray *décolleté* the color of ashes, which disclosed her faultless shoulders in the white blaze of the many lights whose pale glitter shone in that room like the lights of another world. And the tragic French butler, poor devil, excited neither my anger nor my contempt.

One thing had impressed me as singular enough: there were six covers laid at this glittering board. The place at the head of the table was kept by an unwritten law for the master of the house, who was away at Pretoria. And the other empty chair stood for something too, something infrangible and absent; a principle and a person. It positively shimmered with suggestions.

Norma glanced quietly at the empty place in question and a faint smile of amusement curved her lips.

"Lord Croydon Chalmes," she said, reading the question in my eyes. "For some reason best known to himself, he has failed to put in his appearance."

"Who is Lord Croydon Chalmes?" I asked carelessly.

"A polished young cynic who is heroically doing his best to spend an unspendable income. He had the honor to be a Queen's Guardsman; a captain, I believe. He is forever on some mysterious furlough. It is said that he buys his furloughs outright; a diamond coronet or so, for Royalty's poor relations; a hundred-guinea steeplechaser once in a way for Somebody's stables, or something equally valuable and desirable for somebody else. Or perhaps he makes himself indispensable to the greater gods—the War Office and the Admiralty. In whatever way he manages it, he invariably gets them; he spends them anywhere from London to Tibet. Just now he is all for South Africa and what he is pleased to term its republican orchid-states."

"Lord Chalmes has found a stronger attraction," the Angel put in meaningly across the table; "another sort of orchid which he means to transplant, if he can, to his own conservatory in a certain foggy clime. Don't be too sure that he will not put in his appearance. I predict that he will arrive belated, but with some unique apology. So make the most of opportunity, my lion-shooting friend, while the coast is clear!"

"Nonsense, Alline!" said Norma, laughing in spite of herself. "Your imagination has run away with you. Lord Chalmes cares for nothing but his own patrician self. In due course he will go away decidedly bored, and that will be the last we shall see of him until we hear of him in some absurd place in Patagonia, or find a paragraph in the *Times* informing us that he has figured in a disastrous aerial ascension with the Prince of Monaco, or has entered the forbidden city of Lassa, or has given a dinner in Piccadilly. In the end, when his lordship's obituary appears, it will certainly be captioned: 'Died of being bored'! "

Clever parry as it was, I thought that the matter of his lordship might bear looking into. But I merely said—

"I take it that Chalmes explores?"

Digitized by Google

"The hearts of women," supplied the Angel. "He is a superior sort of male *cocotte*, warranted armor-clad and all but invincible in any weather. He is Etienne Gerard agreeably flavored with Horatius-at-the-Bridge and leavened with Monsieur Beaucaire. . . . Yes, I've read them," she confessed; "we read 'em all in old Kentucky; the days are so long! But to get back to his lordship: he has the Chevalier whipped to a thin froth. He is so gallant a person that if one were to cast a tin shoe-buckle, to his knowledge, he would send you around a box of assorted boot-trees—with his compliments—in half an hour. For the rest, his manner is admirable, his drawl perfectly adorable, his courage indisputable. He's been everywhere and done everything. Summed up, he is worldly wise; too thorough a cynic to be a rake. I'm not sure that I do not admire him prodigiously; women generally do admire the Bertie Cecil type of men. They are the limelight heroes of life's matinée. But that is my little contribution to the Who's Who of the period—his *noblesse*, the Viscount of Chalmes!"

"Excellent, most excellent — upon my word!" a cool, drawling voice said distinctly in the doorway. "Good, deuced good, almost *too* good to be true, and uncommonly flattering! Dear lady, you should write romance, not read it! Believe me, if you will be good enough to cast the shoe-buckle, I promise to answer for the boot-trees!"

The girl swung round in consternation.

"Chalmes——" she gasped. For the moment the atmosphere of that room had grown suddenly embarrassing—with one exception.

A TALL young man in riding-clothes, immaculate to the last coral button upon his delicately patterned waistcoat, to the last studied crease and crinkle of his glossy "tops," and wearing a monocle screwed in his eye with a conspicuous ease, so that it appeared to have grown there, was standing in the threshold, languidly flicking at his spurred heel with a rattan quirt. With every move, a diamond on his white hand spat flashes like a thing of life. There he stood, a comely and fetching figure of a man, regarding us with a satirical twinkle in his eyes.

He came lazily down to the center of the room. He was very easy and very graceful. The word "aristocrat" was written all over him. His manner was faultless, not too foppish; a touch of dignity, indeed, and something too of courtliness; for this young man was the scion of an ancient and noble house, with a pedigree as long as himself, and a peer of England. But it was the face of the man that held you. It was one of the handsomest, one of the most cynical faces I have ever seen. Some lurking devil of mockery peeped out of his fine gray eyes, some imp of pessimism played at the corners of his patrician lips. But the effect was not repellant; he was so utterly and engagingly human.

"We had given you up!" cried Norma, surprised.

"You were not blamable," Chalmes said courteously. "As it is, I can not stay. I had merely desired to present my regrets *en passant*. For my entry unheard you have to thank the quality of your carpets and the fact that I saw fit to run in unannounced. Pardon me, I will explain. My man—Holroyd—was thrown today by the big dun I have warned him against so many times. You have seen that brute, I think? As Kipling neatly puts it, he has 'the mouth of a bell and the heart of hell, and the head of the gallows-tree!' For my part, I have resolved that no man shall ever ride him again. I shall give him a bullet in place of his mash for this day's work. Poor Holroyd is at the Halfway House. He will never get up again."

"It is good of you to tell me this," she said, "and I am pleased to hear that you can forego your pleasure for the sake of a groom. It proves that you have more heart than you give yourself credit for."

Something very like a flush passed over his lordship's handsome features.

"The man was a faithful fellow," he remarked half apologetically. But in a moment the old cynical light was back in his eyes. He wheeled around to us.

"Gentlemen," he said, "until a more favorable occasion——"

He went down the room. We bowed stiffly. There wouldn't have been any use trying to match his perfectly easy manner. He paused half-way; an infinitely fascinating figure, gallant and likable, too. To the American girl he said lazily—

"Wreak your thoughts upon expression, dear lady, but paint your word-pictures in future with a pen!"

With which parting shot Chalmes bowed

Digitized by Google

gravely but with a suspicion of veiled mockery, passed to the threshold, turned, bowed once more and was gone. In a minute or two the clatter of his horse's hoofs had died away on the road.

"Your cynic interests me," Sherry remarked after a silence. The servant was clearing away the ices and liqueurs. "He is the thoroughbred sort whom one must either love or hate, whichever happens to be more convenient. And if I were a woman, I should certainly do the former. But I'll wager he keeps his word about that horse, and I'd lay you any odds those white hands of his will hold the pistol without a tremor."

"You give me the horrors!" the American girl said with a shiver. "In old Kentucky it's a sin to shoot a horse. We have a better way with man-killers down in my Blue Grass paradise—we *break* them first. It seems that here they shoot them afterward. Heavens! What a bloodthirsty topic! Come out on the terrace," she invited him, "and we'll bay the moon for a diversion."

He gave her his arm and they strolled out together.

"I am not afraid of being given the horrors," said Norma. "You may tell me something of René Duval's unhappy fate, if you wish. My father will be sure to ask. Not here; you shall share my own window-seat; believe me, that is a privilege I accord to few."

I FOLLOWED her through the tall wide-arched doorway to a familiar alcove. The curtains were closely drawn, but in another second she had snapped on a rose-shaded incandescent, and in a thrill of memories I recognized the room; I knew by heart the few articles of furniture which it contained—the chairs, a sculptured bust or two on their carven pedestals; a rosewood writing-table and the little Chippendale secretary from which she had taken the miniature. It was not far away at that moment; I could have touched it with my hand where it lay beneath my waistcoat.

"I call this place my study," she said, "and here I have set up my ancestral gods—only you will not see them. In this magic space all my air castles have sprung up in fairy architecture, and finally floated out of the window, for I could not capture them you see! And now, if you please, the story?"

"There is very little to tell," I answered, "though the tale makes up in horror what it lacks in length."

And I related briefly how the unfortunate Duval, who was, by the way, a very light sleeper, had slipped away from the camp in the dead of night—it was a little past one o'clock—on hearing a lion snarl in the bush near by. No one had seen him go, but one of the Kaffirs remembered hearing the lion at that hour.

He had taken only his express and a few spare cartridges. It was bright moonlight, and he had recklessly followed the brute into a *cul-de-sac* at the head of a dried-up watercourse, when she had turned at bay. He had kept his head—Duval's nerves had been all hemp cordage and steel—and had met her lightning spring with two raking shots at short range, but neither had stopped her. Then his gun had jammed on a defective shell—and that was the end.

We had found him at dawn with his throat torn out, a ghastly and melancholy spectacle. A mile farther in the karroo we found his slayer—stone dead; a great gaunt lioness with the dead man's two bullets in her loins and her skin all rusty and eaten with the mange. The ground all around her had been terribly torn up in her death agonies.

We buried poor Duval below the cliff, rolling a giant boulder on his solitary grave, and turned our faces back to the Vaal. I told her the story briefly, omitting as much unpleasant detail as the truth permitted; yet when I had finished her eyes were shimmering with tears.

"That is a sad story. Forgive me for having been inquisitive."

She was silent for a long while. I wondered vaguely if there could have been anything between her and that dead man; but it was a wild conjecture. It was only her womanly pity for a gallant man whom she had known—her regret that his genius should have passed away. Then she dismissed the subject with an air of finality, bringing up her reserves, falling back upon the trivial, like every woman who ever lived in the world.

"Do you find the air of this room oppressive?" she asked. "That window is a bit difficult, but I should say that you look strong enough to master it. May I trouble you, or shall I ring for the servant?"

I rose and applied myself to the window. At the first effort it came up some six inches,

Digitized by Google

and there it stuck fast. I set my chest against it and gave a sudden heave. It gave abruptly, and I was conscious of a brief dragging tear; something about my clothing had caught on the metal-work of the sash, and I marked with dismay that two of the white pearl buttons were missing from my waistcoat.

The metal claw screwed to the window-sash had taken them off very neatly. Something lay glittering at the girl's feet. She stooped and wonderingly picked it up. It was the diamond miniature of herself!

Suspended by a slender chain of gold whose mute and broken links were eloquent with their wordless story, I had worn it for twenty weeks, as we trekked through the weird hush of the African veld, while we set our lives at hazard with fate from one day to the next in that land of swift surprise and sudden death. Something of that life I told her now; she had asked unexpectedly, and I painted a graphic picture of the Kalahari—that endless, barren sweep where the bones of dead adventurers gleam mockingly in the blighting sun.

She surveyed me in a silence I could not fathom. Her eyes, abstracted, seemed to travel far away to where the blue peaks of the Drakensberg towered in the vaulted sky; where the Matoppo Mountains grinned across the black Mangwe Pass; and beyond them to the low marshy river-levels where the wild game drank at evenfall at the green shallow pools.

"It is a strange thing, Mr. Severn," she said very softly at last, "that you should carry a mere fetish with you so long, to so many odd, wild places, through so many perils. Why did you do that?"

But I was silent. I could only avert my face and stare out of that unlucky window, out at the moonlit veld, at the unwinking stars.

I could say nothing at all.

"Will you not tell me that? Was it some unique superstition? Or because you remembered my words of that day—that you might not banish it? I shall be candid enough to confess that curiosity is a woman's weakness. You have aroused mine, Mr. Severn."

"By an accident which you will please forget."

She remained poised, arrested, in that attitude of inquiry. I would have given all I owned for the right to tell her the truth. But the spell of silence, like the shadow of a great imprisonment, held me mute.

Involuntarily I took a step nearer and let my eyes linger upon her beauty.

Her hair was dark, shot with a vague copper luster, like a wake of flame on some midnight tide. She wore it without a touch of vanity, but simply caught up in some wonderful way about her head in shining, rippling waves that seemed like a radiant halo from which her face glowed pale and beautiful as a star in the heart of night. And even under her vaguely impersonal regard, which appeared to pass over my head, I realized what held me most—her eyes.

They were dark. Dark as the night sky in the rains, but not black; only as dark, and as deep, with a lovely golden undergleam in their liquid depths, even as her dark hair was touched so marvelously with the molten flame of the sea. I had seen a few handsome women in the "full" dress before; the effect of them was rather staggering upon a soldier of fortune whose hand was steadier than his heart; but looking at this girl in the conventional *décolleté* of society, I could have laughed at all the moralists who have condemned it. Her pretty, white shoulders were revealed; her beautiful rounded arms were quite bare; but there was nothing *risqué*. It sat faultlessly upon her gracious innocence, and seemed the fitting garment of perfect purity. She had never known a trace of the coquette. But there were depths, influences, equally irresistible; the hidden power and peril of the sea.

Norma laughed ingenuously; she saw only a very perplexed young man before her.

"What a dismal novelty—a man without a tongue! A modern Oracle of Silence! That is something new. Tell me, can the oracle be moved to speech?"

She was sitting carelessly on the edge of the rosewood table, slowly swinging one foot to and fro in a mystery of shimmering textures, her other foot upon the floor. The rose-shaded glow of the little electric bulbs fell over her intensely. What a picture she made—and I was very much too close to her for my own peace of mind. She looked at me, amused.

"You are not a very courteous oracle!"

"Only a very foolish one," I said.

She seemed a little puzzled by my silence.

"Oh," she said, "is it so hard to answer a

Digitized by Google

plain question? Why, by this time I might be basking in a train of pretty compliments if his lordship, for example, were in your stead." Her laughter rippled out candidly. "Ah, well, there are not many oracles who would let so excellent an opportunity slip by! But you, perhaps, are different from the rest?"

I was stricken mute. My features remained impassive, but the rising flood was battering dangerously at the gates of speech, and I knew that the gates were going! But she went on with her rippling, amused laugh:

"Ah, Sir Oracle, the interlude is becoming a trifle dull; the populace is being kept waiting! You chose to wear, for reasons unknown (isn't that the legal term?) a fetish, a talisman, which happens to be a portrait of mine, to the Kalahari, you said. You wore it—why?"

I was perilously close—and abruptly it was done! I had caught her in my arms and rained a storm of kisses upon her face, her lips; and for a few breathless moments she remained passive in my arms, as if she had acquiesced in the decree of a force superior to fate.

"Dear little girl," I said, "it was the talisman of my love—couldn't you understand? That was why I kept it; it is my only excuse for this!" I took her beautiful, amazed face inexorably in my hands, and kissed her again upon the lips. Then I released her gently and stood with my head bowed.

For a moment she stood as still as marble—she might have been some beautiful thing of stone. Quite mechanically her lips moved, but no sound came out of them. She made one swift step forward and stopped as if before an invisible wall. Her face wore an extraordinary expression, like a person making some strong, concentrated effort of the will. I had never seen her look like that. It terrified me. Abruptly, almost miraculously, speech seemed to come back.

"This!" she said. "This——"

"Forgive me!" I said; "it is the way of love."

"The way of love!" she echoed. "Be truthful, and say the way of man! Look at me again," and she drew herself up royally. "Am I some wanton 'light o' love,' to be overcome with a kiss? Ah, love!" she added. "What a pretty platitude! What a measure of mockery in that one little word! Or am I in error, and is this merely your way of love-making?"

"I don't know—" I stammered in confusion. "I—er—never made love to anybody else——"

I turned my face away in despair, suddenly crestfallen.

She relented unexpectedly at this.

"Then your way of love-making," she said with the ghost of a smile that was like the shadow of tears, "is possibly a little in need of a curb."

I bent my head, with a very red face.

Then like a fool, I added—

"It is possibly a better sort than a love that stands in need of a spur."

"Indeed!" And her chin went up instantly. "But I am forgetting my guests; you will pardon me for leaving you to meditate upon that point until your ideas have improved."

And before I could comprehend her meaning she was gone, with a veiled flash of eyes and flutter of pretty skirts.

So we had begun by having a quarrel.

I LISTENED to the fall of her footsteps dying away, and the room seemed to blur. I leaned, rather dazed, against the wall, and my hand blundered on the electric switch, plunging the room in shadow. Stunned by the blind buffeting of chance, I groped my way to a chair—misery breeds best in the dark.

A flood of moonlight came streaming into the room. A musical ripple of laughter floated in from the terrace outside, and there was a confused murmur of voices. I strained my hearing—but her voice was not there. I caught the low echo of Sherry's deeper tones, then the minor key of the Southern girl's soft drawl, followed by another peal of laughter. Clearly they were enjoying themselves very well—these two. It was more than I was able to say for myself! Then thoughts came crowding swiftly like unwelcome messengers of disaster, until my mind reeled with them. For minutes I continued sunk in those miserable reflections.

Suddenly I felt a soft little touch on my shoulder. She was there beside me—or I was dreaming. I started up, mystified, and snapped on the lights. I was not dreaming, it was perfectly clear. She had come back!

I was struck by a subtle change. She was all meekness now; the angry mood had passed and left her strangely softened—only a beautiful woman touched in passing by the white-hot plume of some shadowy Angel of

Digitized by Google

Tears. She had been weeping. What a brute I had been! I was speechless—I simply stood in dead silence and stared at her contritely.

"I am waiting," she said very patiently at last. "Have you nothing to say for yourself?"

"Only this," I answered, steadying myself by a great effort to reply—it was like a merciful awakening from some hateful dream. "I love you—but today I will not ask you to marry me. Just now you are set as far above me as a star, but I will find a way to climb to the star. I have found my object in life. Shall I tell you what it is?"

"Hush!" she said. "You must not say these things to me, and I can not listen to them. It is all impossible—— My father will rave at this! It is true, you appeal to me strangely—you are so strong, and so impossible—but I can not give you any encouragement; not even if I were sure of myself. Is that final? It must be. Please take it so. And now I beg of you to let this subject drop until you have my permission to reopen it. I have only come back because —because—I wanted to say that I—forgave you!"

To this I said rather staggeringly—

"Why have you forgiven me, please?"

Then the red blushes rushed to her temples, her breath contracted and she was seized with sudden confusion. But she answered meekly enough—

"Because I knew I had brought it on myself, and I will not have you think I am so narrow as to believe men are altogether creatures of convention."

She nodded at me in her adorable meekness, out of her woman's wisdom as if she had made a confession.

"I was unwise to play with fire, and I have paid the penalty by getting singed. You have such extraordinary command of your features! I never dreamed—— And I am willing to believe you meant no disrespect, and that there were—extenuating circumstances — stay, you need not repeat them, if you please! You will be wiser to content yourself with a conditional pardon and allow this unhappy episode to be forgotten."

"And the condition?" I asked quietly.

"That the mistake is never repeated."

"I accept that condition," I said, "but remember, I make no promises and give no hostages. The day will come when I shall claim them instead. Meanwhile I shall ask you to give me back my miniature. It is the only talisman I ever owned."

She gave it back to me with her unfathomable smile.

"I should advise you to find another fetish," she counseled gently.

"A fetish-worshiper never changes," I told her. "I ask no better superstition."

I bowed and left her, with a feeling of triumph and despair, and walked out alone to the terrace, reaching it in time to surprise Sherry in the act of taking a touching adieu of his fair companion. He was kissing her hand and gazing adoringly into her eyes at the same time, nor did the lady herself appear pointedly averse.

I saw in a glance that he was hard hit, but turned sharp on my heel, making as if I had failed to notice this tender little scene. A Kaffir was bringing around the horses; in five minutes more we were pounding along the homeward road through dead black patches of shadow, crossed by white bars of moonlight.

CHAPTER VII

PIRATE AND PRIVATEER

THE mythical mining-gear left behind by old Steinhardt had turned out to be ordinary excavating tools, with the exception of the big diamond-drill, which we found was a very good one of superior type and efficiency.

The gold was there, no doubt, but getting it out was another matter. There is a significant saying of the Rand that gold is not found in South Africa; it is manufactured. It was not long until we discovered this fact to our sorrow, as many had done before us; but we had made up our minds to go ahead with the shaft until we could find a way to float our shares in the market. With enough capital to develop the mine, it would be merely a matter of time. But we didn't have enough capital.

We soon discovered that the Government Gold License of five shillings a month on each of our forty-eight claims was a gigantic tax upon a property which was yielding no visible return. If ever a law was manned expressly in the interest of the "heavyweights," and deliberately leveled to crush the "peggers," prospectors and small-fry generally, it was this particular provision

Digitized by Google

of the Transvaal Gold Law. But it accomplished its object admirably, which was in effect to give the great companies undisputed sway and to bar out the small miner from the fruits of his enterprise forever.

It only remained for us to break into the heavyweight ranks or go the historic way of "frozen out." In South Africa that significant phrase carries a world of meaning. A volume might be written solely on the heart-breaking process of "freezing-out," as conducted by those finished cracksmen of finance, the gentlemen of the Rand. It is a paradox, but it is a fact—a terribly chilling fact—that it has proven many a man's ruin to own a valuable gold-reef on the Witwatersrand.

The Gold Law was irksome enough, but there was little hope of getting it rescinded, for the great financial houses of the Rand were known to be *en rapport* with the Volksraad, and took pains to see that dangerous innovations were smothered at birth in a golden shower of "influence."

Things were much the same with the dynamite monopoly, except that there it was a plain case of dog eat dog. Without dynamite in large quantities one might as well attempt to hoist Cheops over his shoulder as try to tear the gold of Africa from its lair in the "banket" rock of the Rand.

For all this, it was an open secret that the identical dynamite sold in Johannesburg for 76s. the case "flat" could be bought any time by the De Beers Consolidated for 37s. And this at Kimberley, mark you, some ninety miles farther from the port of entry, all dynamite being brought in in the convenient form of *guhr impregne* and later made up into cartridges by the Monopoly, which received a handsome bonus from Government for so doing. Every time a stick of dynamite went off, the word "BONUS!" went up to heaven in the dull echoes of its detonation—and somebody coolly pocketed the difference. All these things rankled in many quarters and helped to hasten the war.

Meanwhile Mr. Lippert smiled alertly in his sleeve and went about his chosen *metier* of juggling the Volksraad. And honest old Oom Paul cunningly looked to the padlock of his strong-box, or got him new padlocks and other boxes as occasion demanded, not neglecting to keep his inscrutable old eye upon the new Delagoa Bay Railway which should afford him a safe means of retreat in case things finally grew too hot to hold him. For there were not lacking men of foresight who predicted dire disruption and a speedy downfall for this brand-new Oligarchy of his, calling it Mammonized and altogether rotten to the core.

"Those whom the gods would destroy," they said, "they first make mad."

Already above the golden glare of the calm were heard the mutterings of the storm. In three years the thunderbolt fell from a red sky.

Upon this troubled sea of pirate and privateer we had launched ourselves at a breath. We had rechristened the mine the "Rand Reef Mines, Ltd.," and had duly registered it under that name; but between ourselves it was always spoken of as "Severn's Luck." We hoped in secret that it would never come to be known as "Severn's Folly." But those were days of Homeric toil, of impersonal and secret fears.

WE HAD made Ingulf foreman of a select shift of Basuto laborers whom we had picked up, and had set him to work at extending the shaft, an occupation to which he did not take at all kindly. Fighting and the shedding of blood—human blood to be exact—would doubtless have been more to his taste. But he stuck to it rather grimly. Had he not sworn to fight our battles and walk in our shadow? It was a curious thing to see that great Viking, who was perhaps the reincarnation of heroes of a bygone age, stripped to the waist and launching blow after blow with a heavy pick against the ragged sides of the shaft; his teeth set grim and hard, in his eyes the light of some awful battle of the past, with the dank swelter dripping from his mighty chest.

For every blow he launched, I fancied he saw some ancient foe of his go down, split to the chin. It was quite extraordinary and beyond fathoming, but I never could look at him long without imagining that I saw the flash of swords, playing with the spectral and sinister glare of Summer lightning between long lines of mailed men. He seemed to be the very spirit of battle, the incarnate ego of the grim trade of war. And always I would fall to wondering what he had been in that past of his which he either would not or could not reveal.

But the shaft went down, down, stope after stope, day after day, and the great heap

Digitized by Google

of dull-glittering quartz piled at its mouth grew apace.

Blast after blast, Ingulf tamped them in and set the fuse. Presently a dull explosion would bark from below and then he would spring back into the hole with his Basutos and begin to clear away the débris, only to prepare for another charge. In time we rigged a windlass which we had found in sections among old Steinhardt's forgotten gear, and brought up the ore in a bucket.

But all this ore was useless enough without a battery of stamps to crush it. That would come in time; for the present it was enough to follow the reef. "After quartz the assay!" It was obvious that our remaining thousand pounds could not last much longer in any case; and when it was gone more capital must be found. Whether we should be able to find it, time would tell. Upon these things hung our ultimate hope.

So the work on the mine went forward merrily, or rather grimly, for they were a silent lot, were Ingulf and his sable crew. Meanwhile we had become frequent visitors at Raylescroft House. Norma was an ardent horsewoman and had fallen in the habit of taking protracted rides across the veld, sometimes in company with the Right Honorable the Viscount, whose stay in Africa gave promise of becoming a prolonged one, but more often with only the American girl, and a very comely centauress that lady was. And once or twice they rode over to the mine together and surprised us in the midst of our interminable blasting and stoping.

"One would think," the airy Miss Buckerton had remarked one day when they had descended upon us from the great house, "that you were merely trying to see how big a hole it is possible for you to make in the earth, for you never crush any of that big pile of rock. What are you going to do with it all?"

"Nothing just yet," we confessed. "But some day——"

"And just see that great fellow with the iron bar," she purred. "See him move that big stone, Norma! What a chest he has, and what a martial face, and what eyes! He looks as if he were perpetually spoiling for a row, and he makes me think of a picture called 'The Last Viking,' that we saw at the *Académie*."

"Hush!" Norma whispered. "He may hear you!" For Ingulf had glanced up keenly.

"You are not far off the track there," Sherry remarked. "The man is certainly of Norse descent, though it appears that he was born somewhere here in Africa. He has suffered some sort of a lapse of memory and can tell us almost nothing of his past. But what of our ride—can you wait a bit while we saddle up?"

On these fortunate days we would have Ingulf bring up the horses, and away we would go presently for a gallop over the veld, leaving the mine to take care of itself. It was while we were returning through the twilight from one of these late afternoon canters that I seized occasion to chaff Sherry somewhat pointedly with regard to the fair Miss Buckerton of old Kentucky.

"Where will it end?" I queried finally.

He leaned over in the saddle and stared at me.

"Since you ask," he said, "she is too lovable and much too fine to be left globe-trotting—cruising about the world. That cruise must be stopped. It is inevitable that I shall propose to the lady at the first opportunity—and if she will have me, I shall marry her."

"And if she steers for another port?" I asked him.

"Then I am off to seek for my lost Vikings. But I've made some progress, you know, and I am not without hopes. Besides, she is an American. In America, thank Heaven, there is no such thing as 'caste.'"

"But the lady is heavily ballasted with gold," I observed. "Riches are the lost continents of love."

He sat up very straight in the saddle and shut his teeth hard, and I knew then that he was thoroughly in earnest, for it was never in the Severn blood to be of two minds at once.

"Riches be blazed!" he said. "Rich or poor, it's all one to me. Depend upon it, Alan, I should make the running if she were Crœsus in a corset or Mammon in petticoats!"

"Forcible, but inelegant. But perhaps you have a plan?"

"Plan!" he cried contemptuously, "not I. Was there ever a man in love who had a plan? If so, he must be a great curiosity. It is true that the lady is very rich," he added soberly, "and I can understand your mercenary schemers going in with a set form

Digitized by Google

of play, as one does in a game of baccarat; but I am no fortune-hunter. Yet this much is certain: he who meets not often must meet to some purpose, for the ship that is passed in the fog unspoken will never be spoken on that trip; she has glided into the fog forever. For my part, I will speak that ship, and learn what I must know before she has glided by."

We rode home the rest of the way in silence.

A WEEK after this conversation had occurred, upon an afternoon when I had slipped away from the mine with no very definite purpose in view, I dismounted alone at the entrance of the Raylescroft grounds, blissfully unaware that a disagreeable surprise awaited me. A Kaffir at the gate stood holding an exceedingly beautiful black horse, of whose ownership I thought I could venture a guess. As I strolled up the dark avenue of eucalyptus trees to the house, I became aware that the drawing-room was already brilliantly illuminated.

The servant let me in, and two persons rose as I entered: Miss Raylescroft and a tall young man in impeccable riding-clothes whom I recognized instantly. He came forward lazily with his slight, mocking smile, and gave me the white hand on which the diamond sparkled like a star.

"The Right Honorable the Viscount Chalmes—Mr. Severn," Norma had said, this time presenting us formally. "You will become great friends, I hope," she added sweetly. There was a faint note of amusement in her tone.

Chalmes smiled a little cynically, and I murmured something about being overjoyed to be numbered among his lordship's select circle of acquaintance.

"Charmed to meet again!" he threw back almost drawlingly, though, for all that, his voice held a certain languid clearness that approached perhaps more nearly the perfection of mere utterance than anything I had ever heard, and at the same time it struck me as being the exact antithesis of Raylescroft's jerky manner of speaking.

My thoughts wandered mechanically to that enigmatical person, who, by the by, was still away at Pretoria, where it was rumored that he had the ear of President Kruger himself; for it was well known that trouble was brewing between the Government and the Outlanders. And well I could guess that any advice that Raylescroft might see fit to give boded no good to his countrymen.

"We have met before, it seems," Chalmes was repeating, bringing me back with a jerk, "and I fancy, too, that I have heard something of you from some one I have known—ah, yes, from Melton of my own club in London; the 'Piccadilly Pets,' you know. Now that I come to recall it, he had shown me a pair of lion skins; he spoke most highly, I remember, of your singular knowledge of their habits and—er—uncommon skill in fetching him up to the spot where he shot the brutes. Something of an explorer, too, I infer? Very interesting life!"

"Quite!" I answered, fuming inwardly, for I had shot those particular lions myself, as it happened, at a place on the Sabi River near Gungunhana's Kraal. I added with cutting sang-froid:

"Nearly as much so as that of her Majesty's Guardsmen in these piping times of peace! But you are in error; I have more recently gone in for a mining property and turned my attention to a different sort of exploring."

Chalmes countered crushingly to this.

"Ah, yes, short route to fortune—or misfortune. These things, I take it, are sometimes a little hard to digest? Well, I wish you luck."

It was like a game of fence, all lunge and parry.

"Thank you," I said dryly, and shortly afterward I took my leave, relinquishing the field, for I could do no less. That was but the beginning, the anticlimax—the climax came later. It came, as I have marked that such things have a way of coming, in the evening; Raylescroft had come back from Pretoria by that time.

THE days had spun on. By day we delved, and by night, as often as we dared, rode to the great house. But just as often rode Lord Chalmes on his beautiful black thoroughbred; always the same, polished and debonair and resourceful; monocle screwed in eye; diamond sparkling on the white hand that carried his riding-quirt. A romantic, rather likable figure; something of the daredevil, too—very much the ladies' man. If rumor was to be believed, he had done a number of daring things in different parts of the world; en-

Digitized by Google

tered a forbidden city, smashed the "Auckland Spider," won steeplechases, done a host of unexpected things in unexpected places.

After all, I could not bring myself to the point of positive dislike, though I saw well enough the port he was steering for. But Raylescroft seemed to grow grimmer and more taciturn than ever, and more than once I caught him regarding me intently in a way I could not fathom. And somehow a fixed presentiment of vague disaster drifted across my mental horizon at the thought of that strange, silent old man.

I was drifting, drifting, like a mariner without a compass, without a rudder, on a midnight sea; drifting daringly but blindly into the blackness of things unguessed. And Sherry, too, seemed to have arrived with his Angel at an *impasse*. He had grown moody of late, and even bearishly reserved —as a man will at times. He was feeling the adverse currents of life, and was groping, thinking himself out, for he, too, was drifting.

AT THIS distance, out of the visits we paid to the Gray House on the Hill in those last days, one night alone stands out with extraordinary vividness of detail; the others are mostly blurred. Even in Africa, where all of the nights are lovely, that evening was one to be remembered.

For once its strong appeal failed to move Sherry a particle; my invitation to bear me company he waved aside; when at last I spoke pointedly of the beauties of the night, he fortified himself with pipe and book, and would not budge. I was disgruntled, and I rode forth alone.

I remember that night only too well. I can see it now—the long stretch of winding road; the brooding veld; the flat-crowned mimosa trees that we galloped down, singly and by platoons; the silver shallows of the purling roadside stream where I would always rein in my horse to let him drink before he climbed the long hill to the big gray mansion he had learned to know as well as I—for he knew with equine certitude that it marked journey's end: and over it all the white mystery of moonlight and the pale, friendly, immortal stars. It was a longish ride, but we had come to know many a short cut, that nag and I, and we could make it in something less than an hour.

As I rode up through the trees to the house and threw my bridle to a Kaffir who approached from the stables, I noted with a feeling of secret relief that for once his lordship's handsome black horse, the infallible sign of his presence before me in the field, was nowhere in sight. I ran up the steps, humming some half-remembered lilt of an opera under my breath, and then I rang.

I was admitted by Raylescroft in person, who, blocking the vestibule with his great frame, fastened his snapping black eyes on me with the curious intensity of expression which always sent an instinctive chill down my spine, and calmly waited for me to speak. I remember his attitude—the head a little forward, the shoulders a little hunched, one great red hand gripped fast upon the doorlatch, the other hidden out of sight in the sweep of his ridiculously short blue reefer; and I remember his singular concentration of gaze; his mahogany-colored skin; his white hair.

He maintained his heavy calm, weighing me with his somber eyes. I managed to stammer at last—

"Er—is Miss Raylescroft about?"

It was all I could think of to say. And I couldn't have said anything more unfortunate. He did not answer me at once, but kept me fixed with his chilling gaze, until I felt the strain.

"Not at present——" he got that out dryly at last. "She will doubtless be here shortly, and you may see her then if you like. Before you do, permit me to offer a word of advice. You will excuse my bluntness, my friend; as to that, it is a fashion of mine to get straight to the point. You're looking out for yourself—" he waved his hand—"I make allowances——"

I didn't see what he was driving at; I was a bit dazed. He said suddenly:

"I've been studying you. You're ambitious. I don't say you're not aboveboard; you're open enough. It isn't that. Ambition is all very well in a young man like you. But under certain conditions it becomes—unwise——" There was something abominably significant in his manner. "Those conditions happen to exist, sir, in my household. I am speaking plainly, I hope?"

He made a sharp pause there. As for me, I stood and stared at him blankly, for at length in a dim sort of way his motive began to dawn on me.

Digitized by Google

"In a word," he went on relentlessly while I listened as if fascinated, "I accept no fortune-hunters into my family." His eyes had grown hard and cynical in an instant. "That is my fiat. And now listen: not a word of love to my daughter. Not a syllable! You're held answerable. Hark to that! The man who leads her to the church-door will be one whose position in the world is his best guaranty that he takes her for herself alone—and you are not that man."

God knows how those words cut! Living fire would have been nothing to them! There he stood, that inexorable old man with his beetling face and sardonic sneer, hurling out his sentences one on another with unalterable determination and beating a trip-hammer blow with every word he uttered.

"One moment, sir," I broke in. "Am I to understand from this that you have pledged your daughter to marry Lord Chalmes, and with her own sanction?"

"You are to understand whatever you like. Consult your own preference in the matter of waiting until Miss Raylescroft returns. My house is always open, sir, to my daughter's guests."

Stunned — without uttering a word — I reeled away from him through the open doorway, and out into the bright African moonlight beyond—mechanically, half turned back to the lighted hall; but recovering myself, bit down an oath, snatched up my bridle from the astonished Kaffir who stood holding my horse at the verge of the steps below, and lurched unsteadily into the saddle.

Then I rode away through the trees.

Just as I cleared the gate a woman's low laugh rippled out musically from a point somewhere in front of me; it was echoed instantly by one of more masculine timbre and Chalmes's beautiful black thoroughbred came cantering slowly out of the shadow toward the open gateway side by side with a white pony I knew.

I passed them rapidly, yet I found my opportunity to glance squarely into the lady's face. She bowed slightly and that was all. Her face was impenetrable. I rode on. Something—some strong conviction made me sure that I had looked upon her face for the last time in many days. She never glanced back. I caught only the brief shimmer of the moonlight on her pony's white haunch—and she was gone abruptly, without a word.

At the turn of the road I halted and looked back.

There, with every gable outlined distinctly, though it must have been half a mile away, and looking weird and fantastic in the uncertain light, stood the House of Raylescroft—the house I had renounced! Longingly I looked at it with a yearning beyond words—and then with an oath akin to a sob I drove in the spurs.

CHAPTER VIII

GOLD GONE GLIMMERING

THE MINE lay idle and naked in the blinding glare of noonday. It seemed flung out convulsively and violently, like some ugly, twisted dead man; and the blazing yellow sunlight made a monstrous play upon it there and cast a terrific shadow down the big black jaws of the shaft. The wall of shadow fascinated me. It was portentous.

A fixed presentiment grew on me as I gazed; the mine and its fantastic gear and the colossal shadows all turned strange to the eye, like an unreal picture projected upon a screen from a long way off. Things took on an odd effect of distance there in the brilliant sunlight. With astonishing abruptness everything vanished absolutely out of my visual sense, and I fell a prey to amazingly lucid mental processes. They were intensely painful ones. That was the day after my disastrous visit to Raylescroft House.

Staring into the shadows I reviewed that visit succinctly.

I had gone there in my sublime adolescence, burning with a big ideal. I had tripped up those steps humming my pretty lilt from an opera—I burned with a double shame when I thought of it—a lilt from an opera! I was all afire with my moonglow of love. And then old Raylescroft, reading my callow soul, had grimly squirted cold water on the foolish flames. He had dropped a sardonic hint of an arrangement with somebody—Chalmes—doubtless with his daughter's sanction; and then had flung his bitter epithet of "fortune-hunter!" right into my face.

He had smashed me with an immense finality. I wasn't the man, he said. He was a man who meant what he said. Back of it all could be discerned the debonair

Digitized by Google

figure of Lord Chalmes, remaining inscrutably in the background. I left the lady out. But I couldn't forget that she had cut me dead with a nod. She had witnessed the torture in my face and had ridden by without a word, which, of course, she had a perfect right to do. So my big ideal was a little one now; it had shrunk enormously!

There was a little shred of hope—this mine. Nothing but a colossal fortune could shake the will of that old man. It was all obvious; he may have been in difficulties, too—financial straits, perhaps. I would have helped him if I could. There was nothing left for me but to go on, and then, if I failed, time enough for the land of lost Vikings.

Ingulf's broad shoulders appeared above the level of the shaft. I wondered a little what could have taken him down there when he should have been taking his nooning. I knew that his energy was tireless, but even muscles of steel require a rest some time. His explanation startled me.

"Baas," he said, "the ore has given out!"

Sherry had been dozing under an awning. He started up.

"What's up?" he mumbled sleepily.

"Go down and see, Baas!" was the reply.

We descended the shaft to investigate. It took a long time. When it was over at last, we came up looking rather white and startled. The vein of banket-rock—our beautiful, gold-bearing conglomerate—had lost itself in a mysterious stratum of crumbling white schist of an ancient look. We had drilled avidly into this schist, and nosed up other strata still more ancient in appearance. There had evidently been a subterranean landslip, perhaps a thousand years before, perhaps a round ten thousand—who could say? But our dream of riches had vanished.

There was a nasty impotent pain in me somewhere. I made a senile attempt at laughter.

"We're done," I said, "we're through with this. The gold has gone glimmering. We are paupers; it's 'trek'—or starve! And for my part, I'm beastly glad of it."

Sherry spoke up more hopefully:

"There's a man at the Randfontein Mine. I saw him there; a little hawk-nosed American named Jepson—mining expert; that kind of duffer—'Arizona Jepson'—his fee is usurious; a matter of twenty pounds. Grasping beggar! But I'm told his opinion is worth any price he names. It's like enough he can help us."

"Have him up of course," I said; "but take my word for it, we're done with this."

WE COULD do nothing but await Jepson's arrival. He turned up promptly at four o'clock; a hawk-faced, queer, leathery little man of sixty, with a sinister gray eye, prominent bulging temples and a mouth like a straight line. He came coatless, slouch-hatted, alert, and absolutely unperspiring.

He was clad in a red shirt and a pair of faded corduroys, crammed into enormous jackboots flecked with red loam, and he kept a long black stogie cigar forever tilted at a ridiculously rakish angle between strong white teeth. He rode a tall and wicked-looking yellow horse with a cruel brand burned on its left flank. It must have been at least seventeen hands high. As he clambered down from his high-peaked saddle, he came around in front and looked this sinister brute full in the eye, and it evidently understood. He never tied it and it never moved from the spot.

Jepson stepped smartly over to the edge of the shaft and surveyed it peeringly, with a sinister, fixed attention, as a man stares at a rattlesnake. Without a word he walked away from it, straight to the borehole that old Steinhardt had sunk. He spent more time here. We watched him in a sort of fascinated silence. All his actions, his gestures even, seemed animated by an immense prevision. Presently he turned away, and his lip curled. He picked up a fragment of ore and began to whistle something rapid and jerky. Finally he motioned to the windlass. At a sign, Ingulf manned it while Jepson sprawled into the bucket where he sat looking for all the world like a great brown toad as we reeled him down.

"Queer bounder!" Sherry said gloomily. The windlass creaked out a horrible crescendo. "He'll earn his money."

In ten minutes there came a tug on the rope. Ingulf brought him up spinning. Jepson came out of the bucket imperturbable as ever, and looked us over without so much as a flicker of his eyelids. All this time he had not spoken five words.

"Well," I said at last, "what have you seen?"

Digitized by Google

The American expectorated down the shaft. Then he drawled:

"Stranger, I reckon I have seen a heap. And now I'll trouble you for my little matter of twenty pounds!"

With a shrug I passed over the notes. Jepson pouched them coolly without relaxing a line of his hard face. But the expert mining-engineer came out in a trice from behind the mask of the typical Western prospector. He spoke sharply and incisively now and went straight to the point.

"Without a quarter of a million behind it—which I take it you can't command—this mine of yours is not worth five shillings. With enough capital you may make it a paying deep-level property in time. You have taken out perhaps enough quartz to bring you in two hundred pounds sterling at the market price of ore. That is all you'll ever take out. And why? Because your reef winds up short in a 'fault'—a lot of alien strata thrown up on the vein of quartz ages ago by some volcanic break. You'll never get through that mass of foreign strata—it's some thousands of feet in thickness—short of a huge expense. As we say in Arizona, your lode has 'petered out!' Take my advice, sell out at a loss, and drop it!"

Jepson snapped shut the slit that served him for a mouth and relapsed suddenly into the typical Western prospector. He swung himself up with incredible agility on his yellow horse. Once in the saddle, he turned with cynical unconcern and fired a question at us.

"Who sunk that borehole over there?"

"Old Steinhardt—the party who sold us the mine."

"I thought so, stranger! Well, you can gamble strong that this Hebrew-sounding sharp knew all about it when he sold you out. And now I'll tell you one thing more. That borehole cuts the 'fault' about a hundred feet below the dip of your lode. That's what it's there for, my blooming British friend—sort of a little joker in the pack. You've been done, swindled, held up and buncoed. I won't ask for how much, gentlemen! You've paid my figure; I won't rub it in. Good-by stranger; take my advice, and drop it!"

HE WAS off with a wave of the hand. We watched the tall yellow horse and his lean rider disappearing from view at an amazing pace. Then we sat down and stared at each other blankly.

There wasn't a question of the man's sincerity. We had been taken in, he said. He was in fact cocksure that old Steinhardt had swindled us. Of course it wasn't actionable. But had he—had all that left-handed family history, all that irrelevant emotion, that triumph, that despair, been real or feigned—clever acting? We were not sure. Steinhardt had left the country; we never knew. And we never thought of tracing him at Berlin until all impulse to do so had gone by.

By that time we didn't care any more.

At least the mine was practically worthless except to somebody with unlimited cash, and then only as a deep-level property, this cad of a Yankee engineer, this typical Western prospector had said like a judge pronouncing a decree. And so "Severn's Luck" had proved to be "Severn's Folly" in the end. It was a fitting climax to everything that had gone before. Jepson was still within range of a hallo. We would call him back, and let——

There was a great clatter of hoof beats close by. A big man on a big bay horse had reined up alongside, and the tall black shadows of horse and rider suddenly shut off the blinding sunlight. He sat quite still in the saddle, looking down at us in silence.

He had a hard face, too, but it was not hard in the way that Jepson's face was hard. Somehow it lacked the contaminating taint of the money-greed. For the rest, he had a brick-red skin, closely shaven, a square, clean jaw under a stubby, short mustache, and a pair of compelling gray eyes as hard as flint. He wore a suit of crumpled Bradford tweeds, with canvas gaiters to match; but his linen was very fine and clean.

"You've had Jepson over to pass sentence, I see," the big man remarked abruptly with a sharp look toward the fast-vanishing figure of that worthy. "I know Jepson. He's a bird of ill omen! May I ask what's amiss?"

The shrewdness of the query staggered me and I hesitated momentarily. Yet what did it matter to men who were as good as ruined? So I said with candor—

"He has just classed this mine as a deep-level property, which means I suppose that it is practically worthless except to some person of great resources and unlimited prestige."

Digitized by Google

"I am such a person," the stranger replied unexpectedly. And suddenly he added—

"What would you say to an offer of, say, five thousand pounds cash down on the nail for a half interest—I to find the necessary capital for exploiting the mine?"

Astounded, I answered regretfully:

"I should jump at the offer save for one thing. I've been about everything, if you care to know: explorer, transport-rider, and something of an adventurer—but never a swindler. To my mind, this property is played out, sucked dry as an orange. I, myself, have been swindled on the mine and there's an end of it."

The stranger gave his thigh a mighty slap, and his hard face lit up all at once with a singularly winning smile.

"Sir," he cried in his peculiar deep falsetto, "an honest man is a sufficient rarity in Africa to merit my best consideration. I renew my offer; in a word, I make you a plain business proposition, putting my judgment against yours. And I don't deny that I am coming well out of it for the sum I have named. What is more, I shall be as frank as yourself, and tell you that I have come here prepared in advance to buy your mine—on one condition: you are to leave everything here to me and enter the service of my company in the field. Do you accept?"

"Not so fast, my friend!" I said with an access of caution. "First, who are you, and why do you make me this offer?"

The big man chuckled, quite hoarsely at first, but ending in a queer, high, falsetto break. Then he drew from his breast pocket a check-book and a stylographic pen. With a practised hand he rapidly filled in a blank check, resting the book on his saddle-horn, signed it and passed it down to me.

"My name," he said with his odd, broken chuckle, "is at the bottom of that check. I have stated my proposition—there is the money; take it or leave it alone!"

I read the check with a dazed face and proffered it to Sherry, who waved it off contemptuously and stood eying the man on horseback with a broad smile of comprehension. That masterful face was well known in England; scarcely an issue of the great London dailies but contained its stereotyped likeness on one page or another, with accounts of the man's doings at the other end of the world; his fabulous wealth—variously estimated at from eight to ten millions of pounds; his eccentricities, his vivid personality and his boundless ambition, which, to do him justice, was ever more for England than himself.

My doubts vanished as I read the check:

BANK OF AFRICA
Johannesburg, South African Republic
Dec. —, 1895.

Pay to the order of the bearer five thousand pounds. CECIL RHODES.

CECIL RHODES! That name rang loud in Africa and louder still in the great world beyond the seas. The big man on the bay horse was the Premier of her Majesty's colonies in South Africa!

"You see, Mr. Severn," Rhodes said with a laugh, "that I knew my man. Oh! I have heard of your doings in Matabeleland. If I am not in error, you were the only man of Wilson's ill-starred Patrol with the wit to find his way out of that death-trap. Ah, those Matabele are fighters and will give us trouble yet! Again, if my memory serves, you were one of the hounds that were in at the death of our old friend, Lobengula, at the Zambezi. They pointed you out to me in Bulawayo, and I never forget a face. And now enough of this; time is precious. What is your answer to me?"

"I'm your man, Mr. Rhodes," I said to this.

"Very good. As for the mine, my offer stands, and it goes without saying that I shall make it pay. The other thing's a serious matter, as you may find before you're through with it. It involves two powerful nations, England and—well, another country. But who is this young man?" he added with quick suspicion.

"He is my kinsman, and part owner in the mine. If I enter your service he goes with me."

Rhodes's face cleared.

"I daresay we shall be able to find him a situation. But the enterprise I speak of requires more than ordinary discretion; you must answer for him there. And who is that man?"

He was staring curiously at Ingulf, who, drawing up his great form, returned the look with equal fixedness.

"He's a dog of war, your Honor—" Sherry spoke up—"a Viking from the

Digitized by Google

Past. Like another Perseus he's in search of a Gorgon to slay, and he's a first-class fighting-man. You should transplant him to his proper sphere. His name is Ingulf, alias Ingulfa. I answer for him, Mr. Rhodes."

"Oh! you do," Rhodes said dryly. "Well, I think I can send him where he will find plenty of blood-letting to do. And now, gentlemen, we will get down to business, if you please. It has been said of me that I do most of my business in the street, and with some truth. An ordinary conspirator would invite you to his rooms and unfold his plot with a show of secrecy, but I am not an ordinary conspirator. Besides, I know of no better place to talk than here, and of none freer from eavesdroppers. Now to begin."

His matter-of-fact air and tone fell away from him abruptly and a light of deathless conviction came into his face. He began to walk up and down energetically amid the rubble strewn about him everywhere, knocking the pebbles right and left. I caught a glimpse of his profile now and then. With its Napoleonic nose and massive jaw it reminded me forcibly of the redoubtable silhouettes carved on the old Roman coins.

He swept irresistibly into the heart of his subject, tugging at his mustache now and then, but never at a loss for a graphic phrase. His voice rose at times to a high, broken falsetto—a peculiarity of Rhodes when affected by the remarkable inward stimulus of his big schemes. The quenchless fire of the born empire-builder was lighted strangely in his big, broad, ruddy, indomitable face.

"People say I'm unscrupulous, and perhaps I am! But not for Cecil Rhodes. All these years I have worked with a single object: to paint the map of Africa British red. The English flag from Cairo to the Cape; that's my dream!"

"It's a big dream, Mr. Rhodes," I said.

"But it's sane," he said quietly. "And Africa is a big continent to match the dream. For all the pitiful blundering of Downing Street, when the time comes, England will not throw her away. And the rest? The Belgians? Faugh! A lot of blood-sucking vampires! The Portuguese? Slavers, all! The Germans? The Mailed Hand will grind those poor black people of Damaraland to powder before it has done with them. And now the Dutch!"

Rhodes pulled up short and raised his right hand.

"God knows my heart, gentlemen, and so do the Dutchmen of the Cape. At heart I am with them, and their way of life is mine; go into my house at Groote Schuur and you will see. For the true Afrikander I have nothing but friendship. But the Dutch Republic in the Transvaal is a hollow travesty of government, an oligarchy dominated by the grim old Dopper, Kruger, and a carpet-bagging crew from Holland. Pretoria leans on Amsterdam. Between the two an Englishman is nowhere! I tell you this Government of theirs is rotten—rotten at the heart!"

Then he calmed down.

"But after all, it is not the Dutch who need concern us now. We shall deal with them when the time comes. The main thing now is the Hinterland. Kruger is shut off by Rhodesia; Germany by treaty; France by her commercial schemes in West Africa and the Sahara. We have to do with one of the shrewdest men in Europe, Leopold of Belgium. His dark sweat-shop in the Congo does not pay so well as it did. So Leopold will push his stakes northward to new countries, where he can play the old game anew.

"First there will be the usual blind of 'peaceful exploitation,' then another Protectorate——"

It struck me that Rhodes understood the "game" only too well.

"But this time," he added, "the Belgian claws will be well masked. The expedition will start from Beira, on the east coast—not from the Congo; and a Frenchman will be the catspaw to pull the Belgian chestnuts out of the fire; one Raoul de Roquemort, a Marquis of the old *régime*, a preposterous duellist, a ruined gamester with ready wits, the *entrée* to palaces, and the devil's courage. He is now on his way to Africa."

"Duval's cousin!" it flashed upon me. "The man of the cablegram!" But I held my peace.

There was some need of haste, Rhodes went on rapidly. The Frenchman would land at Beira in four days, but should spend some time there recruiting an escort of Swahili porters.

"Leopold will give him *carte blanche*, but he will lose no time in striking out for his real objective, the unexplored region beyond

Digitized by Google

Lake Rudolf, up to the north of the Madi Mountains."

His program contemplated nothing less than the prompt seizure of this immensely valuable district. France would wash her hands of him, of course . . . Downing Street would be fast asleep as usual!

Rhodes paused with a dark smile.

"And then?" I asked breathlessly.

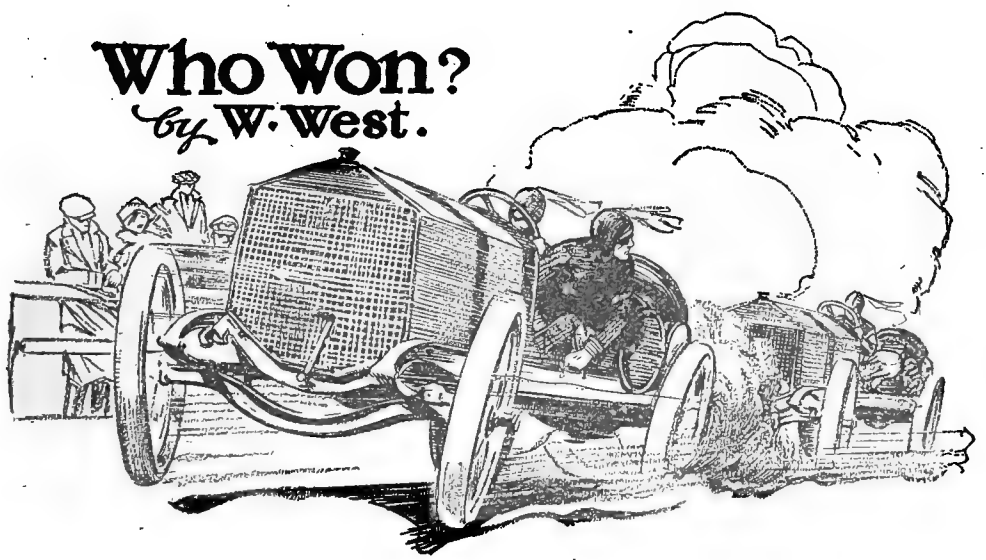
"Then Leopold will spring his Protectorate!"

"But you?" I cried, "and England——"

He cut me short with his remarkable broken chuckle, but his face was suddenly illumined.

"Ah, my friend," said Cecil Rhodes with a piercing glance that seemed to burn through to my brain, "the flag of England that stands for peace and honor and civilization will fly above that soil—and Englishmen will be there to raise it! That share is for you!"

TO BE CONTINUED.



"IT'S ALWAYS been a question with me," said the mechanician, "whether you'd call a driver's life a grind or a romance. From experience I'd say it was a dirty grind, but there are times when the romance that looks so large to the stands and so small to us guys gets shifted to a new perspective. Those are the times the public don't get the thrill and the benzine-drinker behind the wheel does. And it don't often get into the newspapers, either, but we know about it and that's one of the little strings that keep us poor fools working to qualify for a short life on the dirt-roads and the brick ovals, and a mighty quick trip some day to the nine-by-twenty lot in the bosky dells of Boot Hill."

We were sitting on the rail of the pits at the side of the straightaway of the huge, brick oval on which the big classic of automobile-racing is yearly run. Before us from time to time, huge, roaring, smoking monsters of steel, each manned by two shrouded, grimy gnomes who crouched, one over the wheel and the other with arm over the shoulder of the first, went by like a driven mist whisked on the wings of a typhoon. They were tuning up for the Cosmopolitan Sweepstakes and the fortune in prize-money that awaited the fastest car and the most enduring and daring driver in the world.

"It hasn't been so long," continued Billie, the mechanician, "since the first of these all-day killers was pulled off in this man's town and, while the books and the official records show that Ben Hassan won the race, a lot of us fellows aren't so sure of that fact;

Digitized by Google

though we ain't disputing the ruling of the A. A. A. any out loud. But the fellow that wins is the fellow that gets the prize, and, while Ben Hassan got the twenty-five thousand dollars, and the Monmouth got the Cosmopolitan championship, it was Scotty McLean that got the biggest rake-off along with a few busted bones and a scare that was worth a year or two of life."

"But Scotty was wrecked on the hundred-and-nineteenth and never even finished," I objected. "The Crescent didn't get in the money at all that year."

"There you go!" complained Billie. "Objecting to every theory of mine on general principles. I'll admit that you got to pay attention to what a fellow means by his language to get that theory out of it, and there are some might measure my gab up with a micrometer and hold me to a hair-line interpretation, but there ain't no logic in that.

"Look at Ben Hassan! *He* never overlooked a hitch in the rules if there was one, and that was why we never cottoned to him overmuch. Folks say it was because he was a designer and a big man in the gas game, but it wasn't that. Sure! He was always within the law, but he was shrewder at hitting the very rim of it at high speed without cutting-out than looks good to most of us dubs that got our schooling from a spanner and a tire-jack."

I'M NOT saying that Scotty was a roughneck, for we all know he ain't. He went to college, too, but he never had no medals nor degrees for technical training. He started like the rest of us in the shops and at the wheel of a test-car, and just naturally worked into the race-game.

Some of us are roughnecks and some of us ain't, and Scotty belonged to the last class. You know Hassan and you also know that he ain't a driver for the sake of the game, which is nothing against him if he didn't go out of his way to show it. Just because he draws down ten thousand a year for designing cars whether he drives them or not is no reason for him to put on dog, if you ask me. And at that he hadn't so much on Scotty. McLean got his bit for his work whether he drove home in front or not, and it wasn't such a small graft either.

But Scotty generally wore overalls and was dirty as a part of the day's work, while Ben went around in a clean shirt and a collar, and you can say what you like about this democracy and giving the vote to the women, but when it comes to clothes, it's the clean shirt and the collar that usually cops the cup. Hassan could keep his fingernails clean and, even if he used soap and a file regular, Scotty couldn't help sporting black moons even when he dolled up his prettiest.

NOW Scotty didn't care a whole lot for Hassan, but there wasn't any hard feeling between them until the usual female party horned into the game. It was a girl in S'loo that Scotty had been raised with that started the war. Scotty cottoned to this dame from the early years of the tiller-drive, it seems, but she never regards him with more than sisterly lamps until he wins the Waltham road-race in nineteen-eleven, driving the Crescent stock-model home with eighteen minutes to spare.

Then, she being something of a speed bug, this Miss Beulah Masters begins to linger on the personal appearance of her old friend. She's the daughter of a well-to-do merchant and was inclined to regard a race-driver as a degree of chauffeur once removed from service until the hooray and glad hand that went with this win sort of gave her a contrary opinion.

You can bet that Scotty got joyous over the change of heart and made the most of it, but I guess he was too modest. He didn't blow much about that race nor any of the others he had won, though he had made the Crescent the Stock Champion that year beyond dispute. And Hassan, who was head-designer for the Monmouth, had been pretty numerous with this girl for some time—ever since he went into the Monmouth works, in fact. He had made some splash in the gasoline ocean by designing and, on several occasions, driving the Monmouth Spider, and he wasn't slow in telling what that boat and himself could do in the way of speed and stamina.

Now Hassan could put it that he was a scientist engaged in experimenting and just driving to prove his work—and that was true enough. It gave his claims a boiled-shirt style that Scotty's lacked, and Ben was the bird that could make the most of them.

He didn't drive for the thrill, though it was there for him as well as for another. Of course it really was the shiver that put the "he" in the hero for the ladies, but this girl didn't like to admit that, because it wasn't

Digitized by Google

quite respectable. So there you have it. Scotty should have had the advantage of knowing her the longest, and he really was a more famous driver than Hassan, but Ben could put on more professional dog than Scotty ever knew about.

I WAS working for the Crescent in those days, and sometimes "meched" for Scotty and sometimes handled the pit work. I saw this girl once or twice, and after he had brought her out on several occasions to look us over, I got pretty well acquainted with her, though I didn't care for the high-toned way she had with me, thinking I was some sort of plumber, the way she did.

I often wondered whether she thought I belonged to a union—and me the best mechanician in the Crescent plant! Honest, I was drawing down four thousand washers a year and thinking of asking for a raise at that time. And this little pink and white and blue doll thinks I'm just a dirtier edition of her man James, in his livery. But sho! I don't mind! What with gas and technology the world is changing so fast that these folks on the sidewalk can't keep up with it, and you got to bear with them. At that, she was a cute trick and I liked her and didn't blame Scotty a bit for being dotty about her.

I could stand for *her* harboring illusions about my job, but when Hassan, who knew better, came down to the pits with her and started the "my man" talk to me I felt like taking off my coat and spitting on my hands. It wouldn't have been so bad if Miss Beulah hadn't sort of seemed to approve of it in contrast to the familiar way me and Scotty had of discoursing together. So I straightened up and looked this Hassan person over sort of critical. I had a spanner in my hand and a smudge across my nose.

"Say!" says I, "when did you join the aristocracy and acquire a flunky? You go right home and get out your books and learn how to time gears without oiling your paws, and then you can come here and get supercilious. Just now, I'm busy or I'd stop long enough to make you hard to catch."

The girl says, "Why, Billie!" in a shocked sort of way, but she really liked me and passed off my little independence as a sort of personal habit that had to be overlooked. And of course I didn't mind that in *her*. But it don't go in Hassan.

She said something about it to Scotty later and that started the trouble. Scotty told her it was a wonder Hassan didn't get his head punched, which was a fact, but that didn't help him. She couldn't see it that way. She must have had quite a spat with Scotty because he was gloomy a heap after that and Hassan seemed to have a clear track. But I didn't give it all much thought until it came time to get ready for the Cosmopolitan at Metropolis.

It was then that Scotty gave me an insight into what was going on. He was mad, was Scotty, and pretty blue at the same time. Hassan had him two or three laps down and he wanted to get even. The *Spider* was going to be a starter and Scotty was out to give Ben the beating of his life. If he couldn't have the girl, he'd at least nail up Hassan's scalp, and it was up to me to help him. And did I do it? Take it from me, the *Crescent 28* went out of the factory that year tuned so fine that a Swiss watch would have looked coarse alongside of it.

IT WAS at the banquet in Metropolis, given by the management to a few personal friends, that the war came to a head. Hassan and Scotty were both there, for you know they run with the openface-suit bunch by right. There was Carteret and Sherman and Demotte-Willis, the rich fellows that drive for the sport of it, besides, among the drivers. And Masters was there and his daughter, along with the track-owners and the Governor and a few others with their wives and daughters, of whom I only know by hearsay and reading the papers. This was two nights before the race.

It was just like Scotty to go and run the risk of killing his chances in the race by losing his head and going after his fate that night. If she'd accepted him he would have been ruined, and if she'd turned him down he'd have killed himself. Maybe she realized it; maybe she had been playing him all along; maybe she was even deeper than that; at any rate she just put him off and asked him to do his best in the race. She said she had not made up her mind, but she didn't discourage him. Consequently he went into that feed some sore at Hassan, but still hoping.

During the course of that dinner Hassan took occasion to air his views on the value of racing at a great length.

Digitized by Google

"It's the wrong theory that most manufacturers have," he asserted, and he looked sort of casually at Scotty when he spoke. "They have men drive their cars who know little or nothing about building them. Of course they say that racing shows the defects of design, and so it does, but what does the driver know about that? If they would do like we do and put their head-designer on the track, they would get some real benefit out of the game. But, as it is, all any of them get is a very expensive and uncertain kind of advertising. If a steering-knuckle breaks it may be the fault of the driver, and the designer may be called upon to strengthen a part as defective, when a break is actually due to carelessness or lack of skill of another man. But let the designer himself drive and then he knows whether an accident is due to defective design or the failure of the human factor."

"If he's alive to tell the tale," said Demotte-Willis, who drove more because he loved the risk than from any other reason. And he's six foot underground since the Waltham Cup of last year, if you remember.

"Leave it to them," Scotty butts in, returning Hassan's look. "The designers I've seen driving will live to lose their hair, you can go bail on that."

And Carteret, who don't like Hassan either, grins. Which don't please that bird any, you can imagine, for it's pretty common talk that Ben never takes a chance. At that I don't think it's because he's afraid, but because he's too shrewd. But Hassan don't like the insinuation any more for all that.

"There's not a whole lot of risk in beating some fellows, I admit," he says, and Scotty blinks.

Seems to me that Hassan might have been satisfied at getting the best of the repartee, but he wasn't. In his way he was just as nutty as Scotty, and he has to go and play the same game as Mac had done.

I couldn't tell you what that girl tells him, but it must have been much the same as she had told Scotty. At any rate here was both of those fools risking the biggest chance either of them had ever had in their anxiety each to spoil the chances of the other. I reckon when you come to figure it down, the girl had the sense for the whole outfit. She wasn't committing herself any. But Hassan, while he hadn't a definite answer, had to say more than he should.

"There's one thing I want to add to what I've said, Miss Masters," Scotty heard him tell her when he came up behind them unwittingly as they sat in the balcony. "I'm not saying a word against McLean's driving or himself as a man. But please don't count on his winning this race, for he can't do it. If you do you will be disappointed."

Now Scotty hadn't meant to hear this, for he'd merely come up there to tell Miss Masters that her father was looking for her. But it made him hot.

"I'd like to know why not?" he says pretty caustic. "Is there anything about the *Spider* that'll prevent me, by any chance?"

Hassan rose and faced him and the girl turned also, with a look on her face you couldn't read. Ben wasn't mad and, between you and me, I rather think he was more of a man than we all gave him credit for being. I have a hunch that he was trying to be square with Scotty.

"While that wasn't meant for you, McLean," he said, "perhaps it's as well to discuss it with you, man to man. I say you can't win and there's the *Spider* to prevent you, and also the *Spider's* driver."

"And neither the *Spider* nor the *Spider's* driver can scare me worth a cent," says Scotty.

"You'll learn in time," said Ben, "that a car built to race can beat a stock-car and that a driver who drives with the aid of science can beat a dare-devil. You can't win that race, McLean."

"Maybe not," said Scotty, "but if I don't there will be one car that'll be in the ditch before I go out."

They were about to get personal when Miss Masters takes the wheel.

"That will do, both of you," she says pretty severe. "I think you are both like children quarreling over a penny. I expect both of you to go into that race to win, and win fairly."

"That," says Ben, "is all that I ever intended to do."

"If the *Crescent* sticks together, there'll be no dispute about it at all," snarls Scotty.

Miss Masters looks at both of them. They were glaring at each other like a couple of bull-pups. Maybe that gave her the idea or maybe she just liked to play with fire. She might just as well have held a match to the gas-tank.

"Both of you go in and win," she said.

Digitized by Google

"Mr. Hassan thinks you've no chance, Mr. McLean, and I want you to prove him wrong. And I want you to make it hard for him to prove it, Mr. Hassan, like a true sportsman. And I'll cheer the winner, whichever it is."

Then Hassan bowed and went away, and he had no more than turned his back when she grabs Scotty by the fin and gurgles into his ear:

"You've *got* to win, do you hear! If you let that man beat you, I'll—I'll hate you!"

"If you have to whoop for that sport," says Scotty, in reply, "it'll be while the band plays slow behind my remnant."

It was war to the last tire and the final drop of juice from then on, you can gamble your overalls.

YOU remember the race, I reckon. I was in the pits for Scotty, and the *Spider* was at the next stand. It was before they ruled against the practise, and that fox Hassan had taken advantage of the lack of law and had had her built without a mechanician's seat. He was going to drive alone and he had a little mirror on the cowl, set so he could see what was coming behind him. She was a long, lean "six" with a tail shaped to feed the wind and not cause a back draft, which was a new stunt to me though nearly all the racers have them now. There wasn't a thing that Ben had overlooked and he'd paid particular attention to the weight and balance so that she'd be extra easy on her tires. He'd tested her on the track for months to get her tuned just right. And we hadn't thought of that. If we could get out and burn up a few laps at ninety or better we were satisfied. We relied on speed to bring us home in front, while Hassan relied on figures and sense.

But the mirror caught Scotty's eye. He wasn't in a good humor. He went over to the *Spider* and eyed that contraption up and down.

"Is this a street-car you have?" he asks, "or whatever is this looking-glass for?"

Hassan was adjusting his feed and answered a little absently.

"That's to see the cars behind me," he said.

"The cars *behind* you," repeats Scotty. "Son, what you need is a telescope. Then you'll be able to see the cars ahead of you."

Which makes Hassan sore and turns the laugh on him, and tickles Scotty some because he gets even for that dig at the dinner-party. But it was foolish stuff if you ask me. He hadn't ought to have said it.

YOU remember how they went off? There was the bombs and the first lap at slow speed, and then the rush for the place with a lot of dubs fighting it out for a lead that couldn't possibly do them any good and which they couldn't hold for two laps if they got it. There was the snort and the roar and, barking above the racket, the sharper crack of Hassan's *Spider* as it took the banks low down and as smooth as a perambulator on a sidewalk. It ran like a watch, did that gray insect, but there was something in the note of her exhaust that gave me a spasm. There was another rule they forgot to write into the entrance-blanks, but that Hassan hadn't overlooked any at all.

"Picric acid in his gas," I groans to Shorty. "I hope the heads of all six blow off and take him with them! But they're imported castings and would likely stand a charge of nitroglycerin itself. It's dirty practise and I wish to Pete I'd thought of doing it myself."

So Hassan beat it along in third for many a lap, while Scotty went out in front and held it down by speed. There were forty cars and more on the track, and the racket they kicked up would have made one of these restricted races sound like a Dorcas society. But they all didn't last long. There were some that were built in barns and more that were put together by the family plumber, who must have been an amateur at that.

For a lap or two the track swarmed with them. Then an Arctic *Special*, breezing along without a sign of trouble, suddenly spilled her inward anatomy right out on the track and came to a stop. They tried to put her together, but there were pieces left that wouldn't fit and they couldn't make the darn wagon run, nohow. So they hauled her on to the grass and kissed her good-by.

There were some that were cars, though. It wasn't any cinch to keep the lead that Scotty had after the junks that had spurted dropped back where they belonged. Carteret and DeMotte-Willis were on his heels, and Wild Tom Hardy was burning up the bricks in the Imperial. They roared away

Digitized by Google

ten laps and Scotty lead by half a notch. There were five that tailed him before the *Spider* came along nearly a lap to the bad. But I didn't like the way Hassan sat there, driving as if he was out in the woods alone and paying more attention to his clock than to the race. I stopped him on a lap and then waited for half an hour. I caught the second lap and there wasn't the difference of a fifth in the speed of it!

"The cold-blooded devil is running on a schedule," I told Scotty when he stopped for his first change. "He is doing seventy-six flat and hasn't turned her over a revolution more than that average since he started. And he runs like a sewing-machine at that speed. Will it win, boy?"

"It will not," says Scotty, "and if he figures that a ninety average will take the cup he'll find that rubber and steel will stand ninety-five at a pinch. But I wish I had some of his acid and I'd tear the bricks off this track if my engine stayed under the hood."

"And he ain't coming in for tires," I tell him. I was beginning to have a doubt or two. But Scotty only snorts.

AT FIFTY laps the *Spider* was leading, in spite of Heck and high-water and all Scotty could do. It hadn't any imposing lead, you bet, and Scotty was dogging his tail pretty close. He was averaging better than eighty for the *Crescent*, but he was also burning up rubber, while that bug ran like a watch and hugged the turns as steady as it did the straightaway. She popped away on her acid as if she was burning low-proof gas, while Hassan sat in her alone, saving the weight of a mechanic, and sticking to his set speed no matter how hard they crowded him. After a while it began to look certain that, push him all they pleased, they all lost time enough at the pits to let him steal back all he lost while they were chasing him.

Finally Scotty, who had a head as good as anybody's, woke up and got his thinker sparking evenly.

"If he's figured seventy-six will win," says he, "I'll copper his bet with seventy-eight. Give me the signal each time around, Bill, and keep me to that speed if the transmission falls plumb out of her."

"So I clocked him around at seventy-eight and wouldn't let him hit her any harder no matter what wild-eyed ass went howling past him. And it worked, too, better than we had a right to expect. Hassan was a stubborn brute, and he had figured that seventy-five was the speed and he wouldn't change his dope if the whole field went ahead of him. And maybe he was right. Yet Scotty gained in spite of tires that blew out on him every now and then. He saved quite a lot of rubber by uniform speed and he held the turns almost as well as the *Spider*.

We heard that Hardy in the Imperial went over the wall at the far turn and broke his neck. It didn't cheer us any and we kept it from Scotty, who had his troubles ahead of him. But I looked at some of the tin pots that were clattering around the oval at eighty miles or better and prayed that they'd blow up where there weren't any real cars behind them.

The two Bartons began to miss. They hadn't ought to have been in a race at all. They were designed to drive on low-gear trucking for a piano house. They slid down to sixty miles and then one of them fell apart and they scraped it off the track before any one ran into the pieces. DeMotte-Willis skidded on the south turn, hit the wall and did a brodie clear into the ditch, but didn't hurt a soul but his feelings. I heard him cuss when he come in, and it would have been better for religion if he'd broke his back.

I caught a glimpse of the girl who was sitting up in the pagoda with the owners. I saw her rubbering over the track just after DeMotte-Willis had his spill and it seemed to me from that distance that she was beginning to fly the white flag in her face and I guessed that she suffered, but who it was for I couldn't tell.

I glimmed her through the binoculars, and there was a hungry look about her whenever Scotty went a-roaring past, but there was also a sort of strained glare in the look that she glued on the *Spider* whenever it snapped and sneaked down the straightaway. Scotty always glanced at the stand when he went past and sometimes waved his hand, but Hassan always bent over his wheel and drove like the grim imitation of an Egyptian mummy that he was, never bating a bit of his position or his speed.

AT A hundred the girl came down to the pits with Hunter, the president of the track. The race was half run and Hassan was still leading, though

Digitized by Google

Scotty had cut down his lead to barely a lap, and was still gaining. If he held up with ordinary luck in tire changes he had the race as good as won unless Hassan changed his tactics—and I see him doing *that*, the theoretical son of a drafting-board and a pair of dividers!

But so far he hadn't been into the pits but once for a change of tires, while Scotty had stopped a half a dozen times. It began to look to me like the trigonometry method might be the right dope, and maybe the girl thought so too.

"Billie," she said to me when Hunter brought her to the pits, "do you think Hassan will win? He is driving every lap at the same speed."

"You never can tell," I answers her. "He might go out on any lap, Miss. And again every one else might smash and leave him to roll home alone. It's luck that wins races."

She sort of sighed.

"But he eliminates luck," says she.

And as if to prove that no man can do that, just then we saw a commotion in the Monmouth pit and, looking up the track, could lamp the *Spider* rolling slowly in with a right rear rim as bare as your hand. And as he wabbled into his place and his men scuttled to the wheels, here came Scotty, tearing up the straightaway at ninety miles and more, before he cut out for the turn. The girl saw him first and grabbed my fin.

"His chance!" she hollered. "Oh! Give him the signal and send him on! For my sake, Billie! For my sake!"

I got the thrill of her excitement and woke up to what it meant, and then I lost my head. There was the *Spider* out for probably a minute and here was Scotty only a lap to the bad. I forgot the agreement to drive to a schedule and save tires, and I hopped to the rail and grabbed the card that carried the signal to pull her wide open and let her rip. I waved it back and forth and yelled as if he could hear me over the crackle and roar of his exhaust.

"Beat it!" I screams. "Go on and win, old hoss!"

And little Miss Masters claps her hands and laughs, as she sees Scotty bend out to get a good look and make sure, and then lean over his lever and throw her wide open. He never slowed down at the turn at all, but took her on high. At ninety miles an hour he hit the bank and slid around it by the grace of God and the rabbit's foot that guards a benzine bug. And as he went hell-roaring into the far turn and the back stretch, Ben Hassan came rolling out of the pits with a new tire and slowly picked up his speed again. But he had lost half a lap, and before he could get into his stride, I'd miss my guess if the *Crescent* wasn't on his heels and shoving him for the lead.

ABOUT that time I saw the remaining Barton go steaming past as if it was burning soft coal, and I wondered how long that rattletrap would hold together and when it would collapse and maybe kill another driver or two. It hadn't ought to have been allowed to start, and there were some of us who could have told the officials so. And worst of all, the mechanician in it was as green as grass and no help to the driver, who happened to be Carter, a good man, but too stubborn for his own good.

Well they came around after a bit, the *Spider* still ahead, sliding easily at that infernal gait, but with Scotty right behind her. Every one knew that a real race was on and there were plenty of whoops for the boys.

Whenever the *Crescent* whooshed past, the grandstands rose and yelled him on. Lap after lap they chased behind them, Scotty driving like a mad Irishman, and sending his car smashing around the turns or whistling down the straightaway in a way that nobody had ever seen before on this man's track, though nowadays they think little of speed like that. Everybody knew it was *a* race, and the sympathy of the crowd was all for the man that was burning up the track, rather than with the cold fish that put his throttle on a notch and kept her there no matter what happened.

But each lap marked a gain for the *Crescent*. There wasn't no more holding the bottom of the turns to save distance for Scotty. He hit the banks with everything open and skidded clear to the wall on every turn. He drove like a wild man and we clocked a lap in close to forty, which is nearly ninety miles for the round of the track and means better than a hundred on the stretch. The quarter-lap faded a bit with each round, until they came at last to the hundred and fifteenth, when the *Crescent* was no more than a hundred yards behind the *Spider*. But Hassan froze tight to his

Digitized by Google

gait and never varied her a notch, for all the whoop-hooray that the stands handed him.

When they came again the *Crescent* was booming down the stretch a hundred and fifty feet in the lead, and the crowd was on its feet and crazy, while little Miss Masters grabbed me by the arm and danced up and down and laughed and cried all in the same motion. Well, I wasn't so blamed joyous, myself. I had seen the Barton go past lurching like a canal-barge, and somehow the sight of it gave me a chill. It was what you call a hunch.

Scotty held his lead and bettered it with every lap, but not by much. It was still everybody's race, and Hassan held on like a turtle that won't let go until it thunders. The hundred and eighteenth lap saw the *Crescent* go past over a quarter to the good, and somewhere in front of it on the track was that wabbling Barton, about to fall to pieces.

Say what you like, a man feels the wind of a smash before it hits him. Even the crowd caught the hunch and was still when it happened. Every one was on his feet and watching to see the cars come slipping out of the smoke and sliding down the greasy straightaway, and you could hear a sigh like a wind coming out of that mob of fifty thousand fans when something that wasn't the *Crescent* nor the *Spider* popped out of that gray cloud. It was a car that lurched and slipped and teetered all over the track in the slippery oil, slowing down like a drunk having a hard time to keep his balance. It skidded like it was on ice, but slowed almost to a stop, and we knew it was the Barton, reeling in front of the pits with a broken steering-knuckle.

A wheel of it buckled and came off and then the green mechanician jumped. Some man's car smacked out of the smoke and hit the wheel, jumping plumb over it and holding its course by the grace of God and good driving. Another slid past the mechanician just as he tried to stop and slipped in the oil. The fool fell flat on the track, and his mate, Carter, who had more sense, picked himself from the seat and beat it for the wall.

Then the smoke was cracked open again and the *Crescent* slammed through it, plumb on top of the man on the track. There wasn't no hour or two for planning, you can believe. But Scotty had time to work his thinker just the same.

Just a fraction of a piece of time and he had to think of all this: the man in front, two ways to turn and space only for a swerve so sharp that he was bound to skid to glory no matter which way he went. To the right of him the Barton, slewed half around on the bricks; to the left the pits and God only knew who was in the way there.

We saw the rise of him from the seat as he swung his weight on the wheel and whirled to the right. There was no more space between the mechanician and death than between a piston and the cylinder wall. But Scotty turned her in time and said "hello" to Saint Peter while he introduced his helper to him, too.

He went in one streaking skid across the track and smashed fair into the wrecked Barton. Man, but that was a mess! And the jinx had him foul to boot. He'd took that turn to avoid the pits, and the grease fooled him, for he turned and caromed with the wreck clean at right angles and full into the last pit of the row. A car was standing there, cranking to start, and there was men around it. That twisted mess of steel and fire bashed into it like a house falling on a dog.

There had been men there a wink before, but when it lit where were they? You can search me. They were there and then they weren't. *I* never saw them go, except one man that ran past me like a rabbit, holding his hands in front of him as if he was trying to push his fate away from him. In that way he ran into a pile of tire-irons and one of them went through the palm of his hand just like a spear. But there wasn't nothing behind him but smoke and screams and a twisted tangle of steel.

You've seen these dough figures they make for kids, with arms and legs sticking out flat at an angle? Something that looked like one of them, lying flat, sailed out of that devil's pot and turned slowly as it slid through the air and fell like a frog on the road at the end of the pits, just off the track. It was Scotty's mechanician, and I remember that I thought it queer to see him turn his head as he lay there, and then get up quite coolly and walk toward the wreck.

And there was Scotty being helped from the track. There wasn't a body in sight, although the man who'd speared his hand was bellowing for a surgeon and nobody was even listening to him. Something was

Digitized by Google

clawing my wing. I turned to shake it off and found Miss Masters clinging there, with a face like a moving-picture queen when they're hanging the wrong horse-thief.

"I've killed him!" she whispers. "If he's dead, I've killed him!"

"Go 'long!" I says quite easy, for somehow the shock had been too big and sudden to get me. It had gone right over me and left me cold. "He ain't dead. Doubt if he's much hurt."

She stood there and never batted an eye while they carried him to the ambulance and took him to the hospital, the guards keeping back the mob of ghouls and rubbernecks who came pestering around like they always do. I could see that he was sitting up, and that seemed natural enough. The girl was just as quiet as me, too. Nothing of the hysterics about that dame. But I knew she wasn't cold. She was just frozen.

"Come!" she says to me and led the way toward the hospital when the wagon disappeared and I followed without a peep.

Here and there we heard the talk as we went through the crowd. There wasn't a word but glory for the fellow that had shook hands with Old Nick rather than run down the fool on the track. And it was some miracle at that that not a man had been hurt unless it was Scotty himself, though, when it happened I'd have sworn he was going to bag a dozen. Not one of us thought of the *Spider*, now without a rival, reeling off the laps between it and a barrel of coin and glory.

We stood there some time before the doors until the surgeon came and spoke to us.

"He's all right now," says the medical sharp. "He has a couple of broken ribs and a few bruises, but he will be as good as new in a few days. You can come in and see him."

SHE walked past him into the hospital and straight to the cot where Scotty was lying. The surgeons made way for her and bowed as she passed them. Scotty turned his grimy face, half washed free of the oil and dirt, all cut with flying sand and messy with blood, and smiled right pathetic at her, like he was pleading with her and giving her up all at the same time.

"I didn't win," he whispers. "It's Hassan's game."

"Win!" says Miss Masters, as she cocks her eye sort of defiant at us standing around there chiefly on one foot each. "Win! Who says you didn't win? Of course you won."

"Hey?" says Scotty, who was so shook up he was stupid.

She drops to her knees and takes his head in her hands.

"Am I nothing to win?" she says. "And you won over Death. What has Hassan won?"

And when I heard that I got a notion that Hassan hadn't won much either, though I'd not been given to feeling that twenty-five thousand shekels was small change, that way.

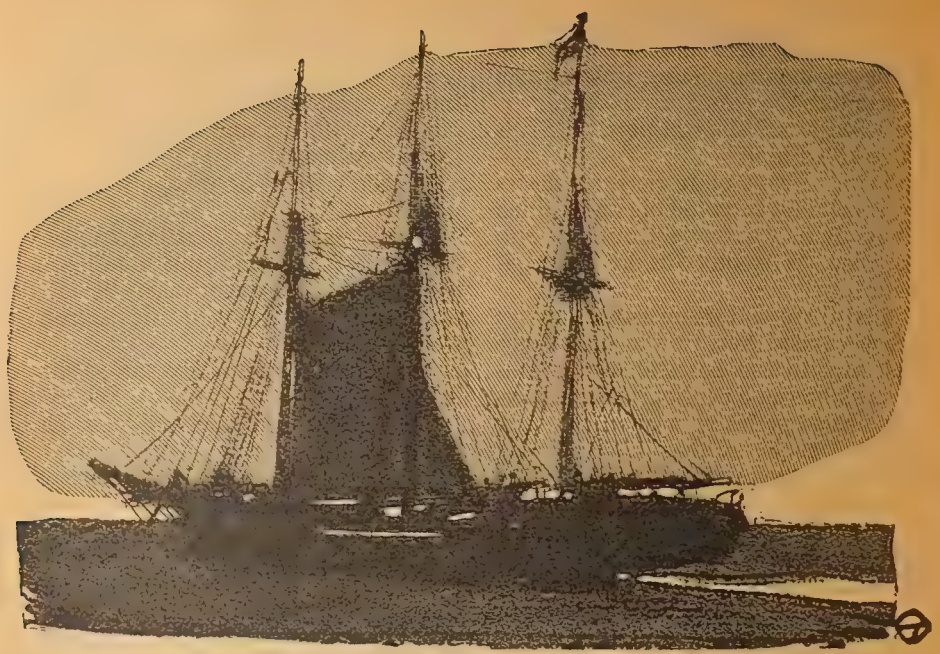
I didn't wait to hear what Scotty thought about it because I could guess that anyway. If you want to argue about the ethics of it you'll have to chin with some one else. So long as her conscience didn't hurt her, playing them that way, and urging them to kill themselves, I ain't going to kick, because I ain't up on female nature anyhow.

Near as I can make out, Scotty had won before the race even started, and perhaps she ought to have told that to Hassan. Sure, it was hard on him, but he took it like a sport. After all, he had twenty thousand and more in accessory prizes, and the fame of winning the first Cosmopolitan, so he should worry!

But there ain't much romance in the game aside from one or two things like that. Suppose the fool had been killed instead of having a miracle pulled off for his benefit? Which is why I say——

But I went away because I knew that he would spoil that story if I let him talk long enough.

Digitized by Google



The Saving of the *Cora Andrews*

by Lewis R. Freeman

(One August day in the early nineties the labor schooner *Cora Andrews* put into the port of Kai Island, in the Louisiade Archipelago, with her officers dying of the plague, and the disease spreading rapidly among the hundred and twenty blacks which she had recruited in New Guinea and the Solomons for the Queensland sugar plantations. A "Captain" Bell, beach-comber and habitual drunkard, who is said to have held at one time a commission in the British Navy, while under the influence of liquor was induced to endeavor to take the schooner on to Townsville. This astounding feat the many-times-disgraced officer successfully accomplished, sailing the schooner for seven days with no help save that of the plague-stricken blacks, only to collapse at the wheel when the treacherous Barrier Reef had been safely passed. The story is told by an old trader of Kai Island.)

HE piled the gunboat *Firefly* on the Donocaster Reef;
At the Motu-Iti Passage his *Molucca* came to grief;
In the pearl lagoon of Happa rests his *Suva* in the mud,
And the teeth of Tuka-Tuva ground to dust his *Flying Scud.*

He drowned a hundred niggers in the mouth of Torres Strait
When his brigantine *Brunhilde* rammed the slaver *Highland Kate;*
He lost the *Fakariva* where Levuka's breakers roll—
But he saved the *Cora Andrews*, an' perhaps he saved his soul.

It was drink—the same old story—that had ripped his after leach,
An' dropped him from the Navy to a comber of the beach;
But drink it was that won him, 'fore the Devil claimed his own,
If no seat among the angels, yet some mention from the throne.

The fear of Death was in us on that August afternoon,
When the slaver *Cora Andrews* dropped her hook in Kai Lagoon,
With the air above her hatches reekin' like a rotten egg,
An' the skipper, mate an' agent dished and done for with the pleg.

Digitized by Google

We was fair to goin' crazy when the news spread on the beach,
An' no other thought possessed us but to put her out o' reach;
An' we met in Jackson's trade-room, an' the dirty plot was laid,
With the yells of dyin' niggers driftin' landward on the Trade.

Once we got her goin' seaward, she could rot till Judgment Day
F'r all we cared, our one concern was how to get her from the Bay—
No man, white or black, would touch her, for the greenest comber there
Knew to climb the *Cora's* gangway was to mount the Golden Stair.
An' the thing had nigh to stumped us, when some fellow said that Bell,
With a load, would cram the *Cora* down the cracklin' craw o' Hell.
So we sent a nig to fetch him, primed him with a drink o' "red,"
Talked, an' worked upon his feelings as the booze worked on his head.
Urged him in the name of mercy, cut him with the lash of shame;
Flattered him, an' called him plucky—said we knew that he was game;
Told him that his soul's redemption hinged upon the course he took;
Said he'd get his name recorded in Jehovah's Judgment Book;
Swore 'twould win him reinstatement in the Navy when 'twas found
How he'd took her to Australia—an' 'twas this that brought him round.

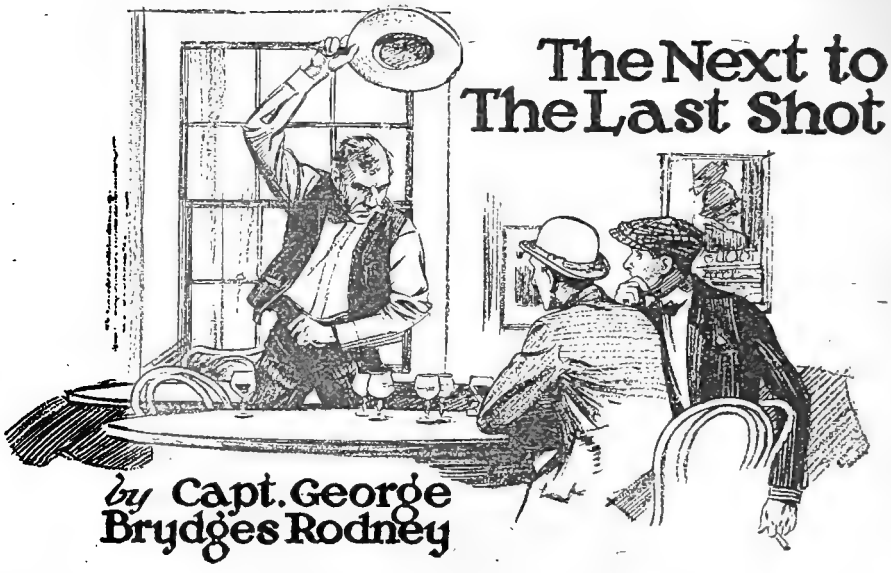
No one met his flashin' glances when we sped him from the strand,
For we knew Death had his tow-line, haulin' in hand over hand;
But we watched him, shamed an' guilty; saw him crack a bottle's neck,-
Take a swig, an' then another as he touched the quarterdeck;
Saw him set his heavy shoulders, heard the ring of sharp command,
Saw the reelin' niggers swarmin' round the capstan in a band;
Saw 'em swayin' onto halyards, saw 'em tailin' on a sheet,
Heard the bang o' block and tackle an' the thud o' poundin' feet;
Saw 'em raise an' cat the anchor, saw the *Cora* fall away
An' go choppin' through the tide-rip at the entrance o' the bay.

Seven days Bell sailed the *Cora* from the mouth o' Kai Lagoon;
Drove her through a fierce sou'wester, ran her free with the Monsoon;
Tossin' over dead in dozens, keepin' up the rest with gin;
Cussin', bootin', swearin', shootin', breakin' the new sailors in.
Day an' night, in ev'ry weather, rampin' wild 'tween stem an' stern,
Throwin' down a swig o' whisky ev'ry time he made a turn;
Drivin' on the dyin' niggers, pilin' on the bulgin' sail,
Till the *Cora* split the surges, spittin' like a harpooned whale.

Six days out he raised the Barrier—coral shoals and coral jaws,
Crooked teeth o' crusted coral, crinkly lines o' coral claws—
Damdest piece o' navigatin' that's in all the Seven Seas,
An' Bell took the wheel to steer her, with the shakin' o' his knees
And the burnin' o' his gullet, as he downed another peg,
Flashin' up as danger signals o' the comin' of the pleg.

They lashed him to a tripod when his head began to reel,
An' he hung there, grim, determined, grindin' steady at the wheel,
With a parasol an' nigger blockin' off the sun's hot rays,
An' a siphon an' a bottle fightin' the internal blaze.
Seven hours o' steady steerin'—how 'twas done defies belief—
An' he'd sailed the *Cora Andrews* safely through the Barrier Reef.
They saved some three-score niggers in the Townsville quarantine,
An' the news o' what had happened brought a cable from the Queen;
But the man whose nerve and courage brought the bloomin' coup about
Had dropped his own Life-Anchor as the *Cora's* chain ran out.

Digitized by Google



The Next to The Last Shot

by Capt. George Brydges Rodney

A TRAIN roared into Nogales, Mexico, from Sonora, bearing the usual influx of terrified refugees who had learned past all doubt that Mexico was not a pleasant place for those who prefer peace to trouble. Also there were fifty *rurales*—country peons drafted into the Revolutionary forces of the State of Sonora for service against the Federal leader Ojeda, who stood savagely at bay at Guaymas. There were some eighty hairless Chihuahua dogs, and over all floated the national smell of the Republic of the South, which is like nothing else under heaven.

Mr. Wilkes, Deputy Sheriff, one-time horse-wrangler, erstwhile sheep-man, standing on the platform on the American side of the International Line, watched the load as it was decanted upon the platform on the Sonora side.

"It's the only time——"

Interrupting him, a train roared into Nogales from the north, bearing the usual influx of Secret Service men whose duty it was to prevent the shipment of arms and ammunition across the border to the belligerents, and the arms dealers from forty States whose clear duty it was to evade those same Secret Service men and get their arms and ammunition to the belligerents. They were not at all affected by the fact that the warring factions did not really want the arms at all, having a wholesome dread of the fighting that they must do if they were armed.

Mr. Wilkes watched them eagerly.

"Show me a lot o' buzzards, circlin' around in the sky, flyin' low," he growled, "an' I'll show you where there's a dead cow lyin'——"

Two young men, the age of new California claret, strolled up to him.

"I beg your pardon, sir," began the elder of the two—he was simply attired, in a pearl-gray hat, green suit, tan shoes, blue socks and red tie—"but can you tell me where the Mexican Federal prisoners are kept? We would like to see them."

Mr. Wilkes waved his hand in a comprehensive gesture in the general direction of Oregon.

"Over yonder on the hill," he said. "You can see the tents through a glass."

The tents stood out against the brown background of the hill exactly as a cake of chocolate stands out upon a mahogany table; and they could see the little figures of the prisoners, reduced by distance, running about like ants in a hill. There were two hundred of them who under pressure had crossed the Line somewhat hastily in the February fight, in order to save their scalps and their arms by delivering the latter to the United States Custom House authorities. Later they could reclaim them.

"Is there no danger of their escaping from their camp? I see there are but four sentries around them."

Mr. Wilkes spat derisively.

"They took the roll-call this mornin'," he

Digitized by Google

said, "an' there was ten more there'n there should have been. You can't drive 'em away with a stick. The real trouble is to keep 'em out. Why would they want to escape? If they was to go back they'd have to work or fight, an' that ain't in Greaser nature."

"Aren't they good fighting-men? I say, sir, it's a real pleasure to meet an intelligent man like yourself."

Mr. Wilkes snorted. "Would you mind telling us about the fighting across the Line? My friend and I heard that there was to be a battle, and we came down here to see how things are really."

"Aye. They advertise their battles like Tuna Lax——," said Mr. Wilkes.

"What do you think of affairs over there, sir?"

"Well, it's the first time," said Mr. Wilkes judicially, "that I've been what you might call pressed to express myself. Since you ask me, I don't mind sayin' that I'm like the man who seen a fight between a skunk an' a ol' he-rattler. 'Go to it,' he says, cheerin' 'em both on. 'You're the first two that I ever seen fightin' when I didn't care a durn which one'd win.' Greaser, Scientifico er State Troops, it don't make no difference to me."

"I've heard it is a right rich country. It might be a good thing for us to take it," said Osborne.

"We'd git out of it," exploded Mr. Wilkes, "just what we got out of the Philippines; an' that was what Sam Small got fer his pigs."

"What's that?"

"Why, Sam Small he lives up in Maricopa. He read in the paper last year that the price of pork was bound to rise. He had a little money, so he put a mortgage on his place an' spent every cent he had in buyin' shoats. He had a big crop of corn; an' figurin' that the best use he could put his corn to was to feed it to the pigs, he fattened up them shoats till their own mother wouldn't ha' knowed 'em.

"When they was good an' ripe he took 'em to Los Angeles to sell, an' found when he got there that the price of pork was away down an' that he couldn't get near what he gave fer them shoats. He had to sell 'em at a loss because he couldn't afford to take 'em back.

"When he got home he met a neighbor.

" 'Hello, Sam,' he says. 'What'd you git fer the shoats?'

" 'Six cents a pound,' says Sam, lookin' like he'd bite a nail in two.

" 'Hm! What'd you pay fer 'em?'

" 'They cost me about nine an' a half,' says Sam.

" 'Too bad,' says the neighbor, bein' interested. 'You didn't git nothin' out o' that, did you, Sam?'

" 'Oh, I don't know,' says Sam. 'I had the society of the pigs.' That's what we'd git. Too many Yaquis over there to be pleasant."

"Speaking of those very Yaquis, sir—weren't they pretty vicious fighters in the old days?"

"No worse'n they are now. The Apaches could always give 'em aces an' jacks an' then skeer 'em to death."

"By the way, sir, don't you think a little cold drink would be about right?"

"Sir," said Mr. Wilkes, "you speak with the tongues of men and of angels. There's a bar jest across the street. I'll show you."

THERE *was* a bar; also there was a table, at which Mr. Wilkes found himself presently seated with his two new friends, with glasses of cold beer in front of them.

"How long have you lived here?" asked Osborne obsequiously.

"Come out here in sixty-six. Freighted air-tights out fer the Gov'ment post at Santa Fé; me an' a lot o' brigadier-generals——"

"Oh, I say!"

"Fact. Everybody was a general after the Civil War. We had forty of 'em signed on fer mule-whackers; an' rotten ones they was, too. It ain't never surprised me that the Civil War took four years fer us to win out if all our generals was as rotten as them—at drivin' mules, I mean."

"What was the worst fight you ever saw out here, Mr. Wilkes?"

"I've saw one er two little skirmishes," he said hesitatingly, "but nothin' you could really call a fight."

The frank confession of the old frontiersman interested them. They had expected to find a vein of boasting under the rough exterior of the old man. Most men they had met in the West had deliberately told them absurd tales of impossible happenings. Mr. Wilkes's reticence was that of a man who can not tell of the work that he has done simply because he has done it as a part

Digitized by Google

of the day's work, and does not regard it as worth talking about. No man can talk unless his subject is interesting.

He interested them more and more. The old, grizzled face, saddle-colored, lined with the wrinkles of a hard-lived life, was frank and unassuming. The gray eyes, narrowed to pin points in the glare that came in from the hot white street, were the eyes of a hard, practical man who would—

> Shake the iron hand of Fate
> Or match with Destiny for beers.

"Not what you would call a real up-standin' fight," said Mr. Wilkes, pursuing the same train of thought. "But I've saw and heard of a happenin' that if you could hear it as I heard it, with forty yellin' Apaches from the Mescalero Agency rowin' about the man bein' giv' up to justice an' ten soldiers from the Fort—Old Grant it was—settin' like statues in their saddles, expectin' every minute to have the women hit 'em in the back of the head with an ax but not darin' to take their eyes offen the bucks in front of 'em, you'd set up an' take notice."

He lapsed into silence. The waiter, in answer to a motion from the Silent One, slapped down three fresh glasses.

"What was it?" asked Osborne presently, seeing that Mr. Wilkes was deep in thought.

"Eh? Oh, yes! Excuse me, gentlemen. I was thinkin' back through fifty years. I was thinkin' of the Valley as I seen it, an' the yarn; an' then the Valley as I seen it later, where Tucker's house stood, an' how it all come to happen—— Do you know, gentlemen, there's been more tragedies happen out here in the West from sheer keerlessness'n from any other two things in the world. There ain't much of a story in this, but such as it is, in a way it kin teach a lesson to the East. It ain't no wonder the West is great. It was made so by the men an' women who watered it, in a way o' speakin', with their blood.

"Tucker—Simon Tucker—was a truck farmer who come here from Missouri away back in seventy er seventy-one. He had mighty little money, an' he didn't know the country, an' he was so da—darned stubborn that a mule was like putty to him.

"I knowed him right well, an' so did Olney—him that owned the Last Chance saloon in Wilcox. We both of us told him that there wasn't no manner of use in a man's tryin' to do dry farmin' in Arizona up near the mouth of the Aravaipa Cañon, but we might as well have talked to a burro fer all the good it done. He took up his land an' hired a peon boy to work fer him, an' a little later we seen that he had run up a 'dobe house an' barn. It was about twenty miles from the Post. An' then he set down to wait fer the rains to come.

"They come early an' light that year, an' the crops that he had planted an' counted on rotted in the seed. Once or twice, too, a band of bucks from the Agency strayed over his way an' picked up some of his cattle an' ripped the hides offen 'em before he could ever find out who done it; so he never got no chance to collect from the Indian Agent fer the damage done. Takin' it by an' large, you couldn't hardly say that Tucker's ranch was any payin' investment.

"He'd been told so blamed often that he was bound to fail in his farmin' that nobody paid much attention to him after the first year. You see, in them days it was an old story that nobody ever settled in Arizona by choice. They on'y stayed there when their cattle died while they was on the way to some other better place—an' any place was better. It was down here that the sayin' started: 'Anybody who'd go to Arizona fer pleasure'd go to hell fer comfort.'

"Tucker wasn't satisfied with bachin' it out on his hell-patch; he sent East fer his wife an' kid. They come out over the old Santa Fé trail with a freighter 'cause Tucker was plumb busted. I seen 'em when they come down from ol' San Carlos. They come that far with a freighter who was haulin' brown sandstone rock to the Mescalero Agency to be issued to the Indians fer sugar. It was a part of the Government ration, you know.

"Anyhow, when they come, Tucker, bein' moved to it by Olney, who knew the country an' the Indians, went to the Commandin' Officer at Fort Grant an' explained to him that he was ranchin' on a piece of land up above the Post an' that he had just brought his wife an' little boy out from home; an' he asked the Old Man if he thought it was too dangerous to keep 'em out there.

"'Well, Tucker,' says the Major, 'o' course you know your own business best. I'm a bachelor an' I can't say a whole lot, but I'll tell you one thing; an' that is that if I *was* married an' brung my wife out yere, I'm plumb afraid,' he says, 'that she'd

Digitized by Google

be makin' a noise like a widder before long. You can't help it now,' he goes on, 'an' the best thing that you kin do is to keep quiet. An' if any trouble *does* break out, send your family in to the Post; or, if you have time to do it, let me know an' I'll send a few men out to help you. Who've you got you kin send in?'

" 'On'y a Greaser *muchacho*, sir,' says Tucker.

" 'Kin he travel fast?' asks the Major.

" 'I ain't never seen him travel none except when the bell rings fer dinner,' says Tucker. 'If you kin judge from that, he's got Eclipse beat by a nose. If you judge him by the speed he makes in goin' back to work after he's had grub, one o' these yere mustard plasters what's stuck fast is a race horse——'

" 'Tell him he'll git his grub when he gits in to the Post,' grins the Major.

"SO TUCKER he went back to his ranch, an' the weather kep' on gettin' hotter an' hotter, an' by what we heard the bucks on the Agency was gettin' hotter, too. You see, they was issuin' brown sand fer brown sugar, an' cuttin' a blanket in two an' issuin' each half as a whole blanket, an' makin' money offen the wards of the Government in all other legitimate ways; so it ain't no wonder if the Mescaleros started in to raise thunder. When an Apache starts in to raise thunder he kin do it in more ways'n anybody you ever seen, barrin' only a Navajo. You know Kit Carson says that when the Navajos start on the war path they raise thunder an' hair in equal parts.

"Well, gentlemen, first there come reports that Apache Kid had took to the hills. Then we heard that ranches was raided an' burned about Sweetwater, an' there was two white women carried off. Last of all come this raid on Tucker.

"We was settin' in at the bar of the Last Chance playin' euchre an' listenin' to a minin' sharp tryin' to sell a mine to a Jew drummer when a Greaser *vaquero* come runnin' in the door with his eyes hangin' out on his face.

" 'Señor Tucker,' he gasps. 'His ranch was raided an' the house burned——'

"It may have been two—it certainly wasn't more'n three seconds till we was all out o' that door an' all ten of us was on our cayuses an' lightin' out at a gallop fer the Post. It was there that we got the real account of it. It was as true as I'm tellin' you now!

"From what we found out from the sergeant who took the detail out to Tucker's when the Greaser *muchacho* come peltin' in with the news of the raid, they must've caught Tucker while he was at work down in his alfalfa patch. He had irrigated a big piece of ground an' was at work on it, mendin' the aidges of the *acequias*—water ditches.

"His wife, with the little boy in her arms, walked down the hot *arroyo* carryin' Tucker's grub to him to save time. They used to make a regular picnic outen that dinner hour, Tucker an' his wife eatin' their dinner together while the little feller played boats in the water of the irrigatin' ditch. It sure was a pretty sight to see him.

"As I say, she had carried the grub to him. While they was eatin' it an' laughin' over the kid playin' in the ditch, there come a yell from the edge of the mesquite; an' before they knowed what was up, the poor little baby give a scream an' they seen him pitch forward in the water, face down, with the feathers of two Indian arrows stickin' out of him. Then the rest of the band broke from their cover an' took after Tucker an' his wife.

"The woman must have been paralyzed when she seen the little feller squirmin' in the water an' then quiver an' lay still, fer she didn't move till Tucker come to his senses.

" 'Run, Molly! Get to the house! Run,' he says.

" 'I want my baby,' she says quiet-like, just like she was half asleep. 'I want my little baby.' An' there, with them crazy-eyed savages rampin' down the slope, yellin' an' shoutin', she set down on the bank of that *acequia* an' took the little head in her arms——"

Mr. Wilkes broke off, resting his head in his hands. Osborne, intent on every word, leaned forward over the table, the cigarette that he was rolling tearing in his fingers.

"Go on," he said quickly. "Go on!"

Mr. Wilkes motioned to the waiter who was standing, obviously listening, behind Osborne, and cleared his throat huskily.

"I don't like to go on," he said huskily. "It's too awful; but——

"Tucker seen that there was nothin' to do fer the baby, so he picked up the little body an' shook his wife back into her senses.

Digitized by Google

" 'Hurry up,' he says. 'Run for the house. I'll carry the baby.'

"With that he grabbed the baby's body from the mother an' tore away up the hill, draggin' his wife with him as he ran. There was reasons why he couldn't leave his dead with an Apache.

"They made a quick rush up the slope, but quick as they was, they barely reached the door in time to bar it behind them. The Apaches mighty near beat 'em to it as it was. Tucker, he slammed the heavy oak door almost in their faces, slipped the iron bar into place an' reached fer his rifle while his wife flung herself dry-eyed on the bed. Now mind you, gentlemen, I wasn't there and I didn't see this; but this is what happened. Nobody seen it but Tucker.

"The Apaches had follered him so close that they banged up against the door when he shut it; an' when he whipped down his rifle an' fired through the lowest loophole the muzzle was against the ribs of the nearest Indian.

"He fell in a heap; an' the others, seein' that they had to deal with an armed man, drawed back to the 'dobe barn. Tucker turned to see his wife peerin' out through a porthole.

" 'What's the matter?' he asked.

" 'It's Manuel!' she says in a whisper.

"Manuel was the Mexican boy what worked for them.

" 'He's caught a horse that was down in the cañon. They ain't seen him. There he goes——' Stabbin' with her forefinger off into the dusk.

"Tucker told afterward that he never seen nothin' but a cloud of dust where Manuel was, but that he sure was glad to see the dust he was raisin'. He hadn't no time to think, for the next minute the Apaches was on him an' he had all he could do to keep firin' through his porthole.

"He couldn't watch the four sides of the house at once, an' his wife wasn't no use on earth; fer she had just begun to realize about that poor little baby. She set there on the bed an' talked to it like it was still slive, an' rocked it to an' fro; an' when Tucker speaks to her she says once:

" 'Don't speak so loud, Simon. You'll wake him.'

"The Apaches made three tries to burn the place with arrows, with a bit o' rope tied on 'em, but of course the 'dobe wouldn't burn; an' the man that was fool enough to go into the open with Tucker's rifle playin' on him from the house wasn't good for no more'n to fill a box with.

"IT WENT on that way all night an' most of the next day. They wondered what had happened to that Greaser *muchacho*, an' it wasn't till a week later that it was found out that after he give the alarm in the Post he kep' on goin' right on down to Mexico City, as far as any one could find out. It was on the second night about sundown that Tucker turned to his wife.

" 'Molly,' he says, 'I ain't got a single ca'tridge left. Give me the old .45 Colt that's hangin' on the wall over the bed.'

" 'That ain't no good Simon,' she says. 'There ain't but two shots in it.'

" 'I know it right well,' he says, smilin' at her like he was half way to tears. 'It's them two that I'm thinkin' we'll have to use. I reckon our time's come to cash in. Look!'

"He pointed to the 'dobe barn where the Apaches was gatherin' fer a rush. Now an Apache don't rush as a general thing, but they'd seen that when they stuck their heads out from the buildin' Tucker didn't fire at 'em an' they knowed he was out of ammunition.

"Tucker said nothin' when he saw through the porthole that they was gettin' ready to rush him. He saw, o' course, that there wasn't but one end possible. He drawed his wife into his arms an' kissed her mighty slow an' keerful.

" 'Poor little woman,' he says. 'There ain't no other way. I done wrong,' he says, 'in bringin' you out here; an' I'm makin' my own little hell right now. But I couldn't help myself. An' now,' he says, 'there ain't no other way. I can't leave you alive to them devils,' he says.

" 'You promised me, Simon,' she says, her lips tremblin', 'that if we had to go like this it would be together. It's best like—like this.'

"The Indians was thunderin' at the door with an old ax that they'd dug up in the 'dobe barn, an' the door was strainin' on the hinges, when Tucker picked up the big .45 that his wife gave him. There wasn't but two shots in it. It was the kind of a tragedy, gentlemen, that only Western women could be called on to face.

"He raised his hand, an' as ten of them

Digitized by Google

crazy-eyed savages drove what was left of the door in on Tucker, he turned and sent a bullet through his own brain an' then sent the last shot through his wife's head."

A long silence fell.

"How the devil—?" began the Silent One.

Mr. Wilkes rose trembling to his feet and in a very gust of passion dashed his sombrero down upon the table, sweeping nine empty beer glasses into the lap of the astonished Mr. Osborne.

"Hang it all!" he howled. "My mind's shore failin'. That's the third time I've gummed that story up."

Disowned!

An Adventure of Dick Anthony of Arran. by Talbot Mundy

HOTTER than the roof of Tophet, dazzling like diamonds, and cut up into short horizons by a haze of hot air hurrying upward, the plains to southward of the Caspian lay as they did when Xerxes made his millions ready to invade the West, or when Alexander of Macedon prepared a more successful journey in the opposite direction. Only a few carrion crows (for they are climate-proof), some sleepy kites, and here or there an eagle, showed any sign of life or of interest in the hot earth where the jackals slept in shadow and the bones of men and animals had rest from the splintering teeth.

But above, where a mountain trail ran in and out between the rocks and trees and a current of cool air crept downward from the mountain tops, a few more than four hundred men galloped behind Richard Anthony—away from Astrabad—full pelt westward. They were solemn Moslems armed with plundered rifles, and Cossack sabers clattered by their saddles as they rode.

Dick rode ahead of them, as he ever did, like an arrow on its way. His horse seemed part of him, born at one creation when the best were fashioned, clean bone and steel-spring muscles responding to his brain. His left hand, low and still, seemed to hold the reins carelessly, and yet the horse answered to his instant thought. His extraordinary eyes, whose color no man ever seemed to know, swept the trail ahead and missed no detail of it. He seemed to be living in the near future; the impression was that he had thrown his heart away ahead of him and was galloping to get it, and there was only one person in the squadron thundering at his back who betrayed less eagerness than he.

Not very far behind him—preceded by some fifty men, and with a closed-up guard on either hand—there rode two women; and a Scotsman, six feet five or more in height and built on the Samson plan, rode outside the guard, clinging to his horse with both hands and swearing savagely whenever he was jolted more than usual.

Digitized by Google

The women were in single file, not side by side, and neither of them seemed to care to look ahead. The Princess of Russia who rode first, astride of a high Cossack saddle, grudged each inch of the journey; ever and again she turned to look wildly, speculatively, in the faces of the nearest men, only to look away again. Sometimes two and sometimes four abreast, every now and then in single file when the trail narrowed to a track, the horsemen rode with the confidence that only comes of following such leaders as Dick Anthony; she read no pity in their faces—no symptom of doubt or hesitation—no hint of anything but utter loyalty to Dick. She knew that at a word from Dick they would have tossed her living from the sheerest crag without thought of Russia or of consequences, and that without his leave they would not dare molest her. So much had Persia and the Persians changed already, under the hand of a free man unafraid!

The maid who rode behind her was less of a horsewoman, and in her case to the dust from two hundred hoofs was added the discomfort of bouncing on a Cossack saddle, as a dry pea dances on a drum. She clung with both hands and suffered; but she smiled, for her eyes were for Andry Macdougal on the flank, who was suffering as she did. She cared nothing, and for nothing, so that Andry was only near her; and he, good loyal clansman that he was, regarded her as one more arrow in Dick's quiver. He was Dick's man, and would be until death; therefore it was right, and the only thing imaginable, that his sweetheart should be Dick's servant. To his Scots way of thinking it was logical, and therefore not remarkable, that Marie Mouquin should be riding where she was; and if Dick had seen fit to carry off a Princess to act chaperon, that was only one more proof of Dick's worthiness to lead.

From time to time Andry glanced at the two women, for they were his charge; but no one except Marie Mouquin could have guessed which of them might be his sweetheart, and as a matter of fact it was the Princess who drew the first response from him. She had been thinking—swiftly—savagely. She caught his eye and signed to him; and since she was Dick's enemy, and the maid a friend, he gave the enemy attention.

He steered his horse as if it were a boat, with the rudder at the wrong end, and the immediate result was that he crashed into four Persians and upset the formation of a troop. There was a lot of Persian swearing that was checked by a sharp Scots oath and a blow from a Highland fist that could have felled an ox; then Andry Macdougal, still holding to the saddle, closed in by the Princess and looked at her sideways, inquiringly.

"What ar-r-re ye wantin' noo?" he asked her in a voice that was full of curiosity, but lacked reverence.

"Tell Mr. Anthony——"

"Mebbe ye tak' me f'r a messenger? Mebbe ye think I'm ordered to wait on ye? Then, let me assure ye that ye're wrang!"

But Andry was dealing with a woman whose business had ever been to understand and mold strong men. At twenty-three she was reckoned the cleverest woman in the Russian empire, and though she was beaten now, defeated and made prisoner, she still had too much wit about her to be worsted by a man of Andry's caliber. She recognized the Calvinistic temperament, that must tell her of her faults or burst; so she gave him all the opportunity he needed, and reserved her fire.

"Is it no part of your duty to oblige a lady?" she asked him, in English that was soft and seductive.

"Leddy?" he demanded. "Leddy?"

His horse lurched suddenly as the track grew narrow and a big rock barred the way. For a moment there was none of him visible except his leg and arm, as he hung down on the off side, struggling to regain his seat. A Persian galloped up, laughing, to help haul him back into position, and the good horse groaned relief when the weight was balanced again in the middle of his back.

"Was Jezebel a leddy?" he demanded then, wrinkling his face into a gargoyle grin, to hide his temper.

"Jezebel had servants," said the Princess.

"Aye! An' they threw her doon fra' an upper window!"

She looked away, to hide a smile, for she had fenced with this man before; she knew well that the real Andry Macdougal would proceed to show himself, now that the outer crust of critical effrontery had peeled away. She gave him a full minute to look hard at her, in which he might contrast her beauty

Digitized by Google

with her plight; and then she looked back at him with eyes that seemed liquid—eyes that expressed all the sweet sorrow in the world.

"What was the wor-r-rdin' o' y'r message?" he demanded.

"That I wish to speak to Mr. Anthony."

"I hae ma doots—I hae ma doots!" clucked Andry, glancing forward to where Dick's red head showed through the dust.

He looked again at the Princess—once back at the French maid galloping behind her—and then down at his horse. Then Princess, maid, the other guards, and Andry's horse were all at once in fresh formation, for when Andry rode horesback the rules of the road had all to be suspended for his benefit. As where the guns go everything makes room, so where Andry went great gaps yawned wide ahead of him. He had a notion that spurs are meant for insertion in a horse's stomach, so the big steel weapons he had taken from a Cossack's boots began to reach for the horse's vitals, and the poor beast plunged.

He shot through a living, scattering passage-way to Dick, overhauling him before his great weight brought the horse back to a trot.

"She wants to speak wi' ye!" said Andry.

"Who?" asked Dick, still looking ahead of him.

"Who? Yon Jezebel—the Princess Karageorgovich."

"Walk, march!" Dick ordered, leaning back in the saddle and throwing up an arm. It was time to ease the horses in any event.

"Send her to me," he ordered; and Andry let his horse stand until the leading troop had overtaken him.

"Ye may go speak wi' him," he said offhandedly; and then, since the enemy was now for Dick to deal with, he paid more attention to his friend.

His huge arm reached out, and a hand that could have wrenched a fair-sized tree out by the roots was laid on Marie Mouquin's. In another moment he was off his horse and walking beside hers, with his tremendous arm around her waist and his whole, huge manhood all aglow with rapture.

"Lassie," he asked her, "what's the French f'r bein' i' love?"

So she began to teach him—

"*J'aime, tu aimes, il aime*——"

THE Princess Olga Karageorgovich trotted her horse until she was abreast of Dick; then, riding beside him, for two minutes she said nothing. Times without number she had said too much, and Dick had usually won the trick from her by keeping silence while she squandered words. As usual, she wanted him to speak first; as ever, hatless, red-headed, resolute, he sat his horse like a gentleman in armor and gave her speech precedence.

"What will you do with me, *monsieur le prince des brigands?*" she inquired.

Her smile would have dazzled any ordinary man, as it was meant to dazzle Dick. But he seemed all dignity, and his eyes, after one swift glance at her, were busy with the trail ahead.

"Make use of you," he said.

In an instant, then, her plan was ready. Her trade was to snatch advantage between two seconds, and to read unintended meanings, or chance-dropped meanings, into words. She told herself that she hated and despised Dick Anthony; only an hour or two ago she had flung a knife at him and missed him by an inch; but she knew, deep down in her she-tiger heart, that she could love him as no woman ever loved a man if he would let her! There was truth—more than a little truth—between the words of her soft answer.

"I am a proud woman, Mr. Anthony. You could not make use of me without my leave, prisoner or not. But—I regret a recent incident. How may I make amends?"

"Which incident?" asked Dick.

It was her opinion that he was not even thinking of her; she believed his thoughts away in the foothills ahead, where she knew there must be two Russian regiments, and where at least three thousand of Dick's Persians were probably at grips with them. It seemed to her that there *could* be only one incident, since she had only, ever, thrown one knife at him. It did not occur to her that there had been a thousand—that she had been his Nemesis from the day when they first met by the Nile—that he had a right to blame her for every subsequent event that had cut him farther off from home and income and fair repute.

His shirt was in rags already, and his boots were cracked; but she did not blame herself for either fact. He was an outlaw, who had been heir to the estates and good

Digitized by Google

name of the Anthonys; but she did not consider it was all her doing. She thought only that it might be well to evade mention of the knife, since his thoughts were wandering, and to direct the conversation into much more fruitful channels.

"Do you understand—quite—what it means to hold me prisoner?" she asked.

Dick looked sharply at her, and then away again ahead. If he answered her at all his words were drowned by the jingle of the squadron, the drumming hoofs, and the loud talk of four hundred men. His lips moved, but she was not sure whether he spoke or not.

"Has not your head been turned, my friend?"

She paused, but he did not speak or look at her. She knew he was listening now, for his eyes were alight, and his attitude had changed, although a less acute observer might have thought him still daydreaming.

"Perhaps you think that all the luck in the world is yours since a storm blew and helped you smash the Caspian fleet? Eh? You err, my friend! Russia has a long arm, and a deep purse! In the end, Russia is always luckiest!"

Dick stooped to do something to his stirrup leather, and she mistook his movement for a symptom of distress, for observation had taught her long ago that men have very childlike ways of hiding what they feel from women. She felt bolder instantly.

"You know a little about me. You have felt a little—more than a little of my influence. You must have learned that I am part of Russia's secret government. I said *secret* government. Do you suppose, my friend, that the Okhrana—and that *is* the secret government—will leave me, who know *all* its secrets, long in your keeping? It would rather leave me dead!"

She spoke the truth now, for the first time in her dealings with Dick Anthony. Once the sword held over her head by the Okhrana had been the threat of marriage and exile on a wild Siberian estate; now she doubted whether less than her death would satisfy the huge political machine that holds Russia in its grip. The Okhrana had given her leave to use Dick Anthony in her campaign of penetration into northern Persia. She had loved and lost him. Now she was his prisoner. Russia's long arm—poison, dagger, bullet—would be sure to reach her before she could tell her captor many secrets; but even so she did not mean to tell much, unless for full value in return.

Dick's eyes still watched the trail ahead, and now and then when they rounded some crag and the hot plain came into view he swept the horizon carefully with his binoculars; but now, after a moment, he closed the glasses and looked down at her.

"I see what you mean," he said. "They'll think I'll make you talk."

"Bah!" she laughed back at him, and when she chose to seem scornful she looked more lovely than at any other time. "I would tell you nothing unless I wished!"

"But they won't believe that."

He was looking down at her again, and she could tell now that he was thinking swiftly about her and what she said. His eyes seemed to look straight through her.

"And of course they won't believe that I won't torture you."

She laughed deliciously. Had Dick Anthony not been gentleman by creed and deed he would have succumbed ever so long ago to one or other of the offers she had made him. Had he been less than gentleman, it was conceivable he would not be in Persia. She was afraid of him at any time only because she knew his naked honesty was too strong for her subterfuge.

"It's awkward," he said. "I brought you to chaperon your maid. Andry loves her, and she seems to love him. There's no means of marrying them in this part of the world; and—you'll excuse my mentioning it—I've seen the black and blue marks on the woman's arms."

"Well?" asked the Princess unguardedly.

"Couldn't leave her with you."

"Am I called in question for punishing my maid?" she demanded through lips that seemed thinner all at once and less delicious.

From Dick's point of view he had said enough, but since she asked it he vouchsafed some further explanation.

"Couldn't leave her with you. Couldn't take her without another woman, to help observe the decencies. Took you. Have to keep you until we've got 'em safely married, or else found somebody to take your place."

"Then, you mean——"

"Exactly that!" said Dick, patting his charger's neck.

Digitized by Google

"What will you do with me when you've found this other woman?"

"Let you go."

As usual, the disconcerting unexpected! Of all the possibilities on her horizon, the one she liked least, and was ready to fight hardest to prevent, was the risk of being loosed and left to her own devices to protect herself from the Okhrana. She had failed because Dick had been too strong and too original for her; but she had entered into the campaign for love of Dick; so now she vowed that Dick himself should save her, or else that the two of them should make their exit from the world in one grim holocaust.

She was desperate—utterly without any hope but Dick, so she chose for the moment to appear indifferent to him. As his captive she was safer and more free than she was ever likely to be again should he release her; for the least that the Okhrana would do to her would be to give her in marriage to a man whose very photograph had made her scream the first time that she saw it. So she summoned all the art she knew to aid her, and pretended she was pleased.

If she had had the sense, that minute, to be honest with Dick Anthony, she very likely might have struck some bargain with him that would have given her the upper hand again, for Dick's heart was as kind as his honor was unsullied. He would have died, and would have let Andry die beside him, rather than take too great advantage of a defenseless woman, however mean an enemy she might have been. But she could not be honest; she still thought it best to pretend that her power with the Okhrana would be as great as ever.

"Then, remember," she said, smiling triumphantly, "I have made no bargain with you! When you set me free, I am free to——"

"To go where, do what, and say anything you please," said Dick.

She bit her lip. Already she was wishing she had told the truth, but pride prevented her; she must cling now to the shadow of her power at all costs.

"You are most gallant. I don't like to accept my freedom on those terms. The minute I am free I shall be required to help hunt you—to use my knowledge of your whereabouts against you. Mr. Anthony—Dick—in spite of—in spite of everything, I have a regard for you that—that—is not easy to forget. Look at me—Dick Anthony! Look into my eyes!"

He was unafraid; he looked, and it was she who had the worst of the encounter. Somewhere, surely, in the world there was a woman who would some day look into Dick's eyes and read there that she had him conquered; but she would be a woman whose honor was as clean as his, and whose love was tender, sweet and true. Dick had not met the woman yet whose eyes could make his head swim, or whose arguments could budge him from the path he thought was right.

"What do you see in my eyes? Do you think I hate you?"

"I don't think you know what hate is," answered Dick, "any more than a fish knows what water is. You merely swim in it."

"Then, you mean to—get rid of me?"

"At the first chance!"

"Dick!"

He frowned. There had been only ten people who had dared to call him Dick without a prefix of some kind. She laid a hand on his. Instantly he spurred his horse; it was the merest touch on the off side, but the horse lurched sideways and her hand rested on the empty air. She lost her self-control then, or else threw it to the winds. She seized his rein, and swung her own horse around until he and she faced each other, knee to knee, and whether he would or not he had to see that she was lovely. Her parted lips, disordered hair, and flashing eyes became her; and the tears, art-summoned, that glistened on the brim softened the hearts of even the leading files of the squadron that were obliged to halt and watch.

"Puir lassie!" muttered Andry, pressing forward through the crowding ranks in case Dick needed him. He had already forgotten that a little while ago he called her "Jezebel," and that his sweetheart's arms bore bruises.

"Are you a gentleman, Dick Anthony of Arran, or are you the impostor—the pretender people say you are?"

Dick did not answer, and for the first time in her knowledge of him she could see that he was disconcerted. She thought swiftly, and in a flash the reason came to her; she knew at last that she had found the weak place in his armor. Like a torrent the hot, salt tears welled out and streamed

Digitized by Google

down her cheeks, while she leaned forward on her horse's neck and sobbed as if her heart were breaking.

Dick moved his charger until he was beside her again. Then he laid his right hand on her shoulder, very gently.

"What is it you want?" he asked. "What is it you expect of me?"

"Can't you understand?" she sobbed. "Can't you see? I betrayed Russia for you! I betrayed the Okhrana!"

"I did not ask you to."

"Does that make any difference? They call me traitress! Will you—will you—have the heart to send me back to them to—to—face the—co-co-consequences?"

"No," said Dick, "not if you don't want to go."

She sat up on her horse as if the weight of half the world had just been taken from her shoulders. Dick rose up in his stirrups and looked round.

"Squadron!" he shouted. "Ter-r-rot!—March!"

The Princess Olga Karageorgovich had won her way; but the upper hand, the mastery, was still Dick Anthony's.

II

BEFORE he rode away to invade Russia with four hundred men, Dick's orders to Usbeg Ali Khan had been peremptory. Two Russian regiments were entrenched at bay, and they were to be held there; but there was to be no waste of life or effort. To make things doubly sure Dick had insisted he would be best pleased on his return to find them still at bay. Usbeg Ali's business was merely to cut them off from all communication and to prevent them from marching on Astrabad.

But Afghans are a touchy breed of men, as well as vainglorious, given half an opportunity. A force three thousand strong, enthusiastic as a consequence of two quick victories and swollen almost hourly by additions hurrying in from two rebel provinces—six captured field guns and a machine-gun, ammunition enough and to spare—combined into a chance that Usbeg Ali Khan could not induce himself to miss.

It was myrrh and frankincense to his martial soul that Dick had trusted him to stay and bridle nine-tenths of the little army, but it was gall and vinegar to have been bidden wait on Dick's return before attacking. To a hair he knew Dick's notions about discipline; but Dick's back had scarcely disappeared in a cloud of dust kicked up by his galloping squadron before Usbeg Ali's brain was busy with a plan for seeming to obey while disobeying.

If only the Russian commander could be nagged or tempted into sallying, not even Dick would be able to find fault with an answering attack, particularly should the move succeed; and Usbeg Ali meant it should be so resolute that failure would be impossible.

The Russians were entrenched on a commanding height, with water in abundance and provisions that would very likely last a month. The two regiments were not at full war strength, but the scouts brought word of at least three thousand, including camp-followers and supernumeraries; and against three thousand trained soldiers Usbeg Ali had but four thousand less than half-trained rebels. Yet he did not hesitate.

He knew that the Russians would suppose Dick Anthony to be with the attacking force; otherwise they surely would not wait behind their hastily raised earthworks. Dick's name was as sure by this time to strike terror into Russian hearts as it was to encourage Persian, and though he yearned for the credit of a victory to his own account, Usbeg Ali had no intention of enlightening the Russians as to Dick's absence, or of doing any other foolish thing that would put heart into them; he meant to take advantage of every point, imaginary or otherwise, that chanced to come his way.

He judged that surely, too, the Russians must suppose him stronger than he really was, and at once he set about making dispositions of his men that would confirm the supposition. Better than that, though, he knew that the Russians were not yet aware of Dick's capture of a battery, and that six of their own guns were ready to be used against them.

Six guns, under the direction of a true commander, were enough to turn the scale in favor of the untrained besieging force, and Usbeg Ali meant to use them with a generalship that would outweigh the bad shooting of scratch gunners. But to have used all six with which to start things would have been flat disobedience of Dick's orders.

Digitized by Google

One was enough to play the overture, and he had a right, with one gun, to search out the enemy's defenses, for that was a proceeding no commander worthy of the name would dare neglect.

So he told off one of his seven personal followers, who had been a lieutenant in Abdur Rahman's artillery, to take one gun to the top of a natural earth redoubt and make as good shooting as he could at the Russian camp.

The shooting was unutterably vile, for the officer was years-long out of practise and his day-old crew were afraid of the belching monster they were called upon to serve; shot after shot went whining in the distance, missing the Russian camp by hundreds of feet and bursting in the forest three-quarters of a mile beyond. But Usbeg Ali's purpose was well served.

The Russians were apprised unpleasantly of a battery's disaster, for only from one source could Dick have obtained artillery. That took half the sting out of their training, and brought them down, so far as temper was concerned, to a lower level than their untrained enemy. And their attention was kept fixed on one point, while Usbeg Ali made a new surprise ready for them in a different direction.

Usbeg Ali was no amateur; he had studied soldiering with close attention from the day when he was given his first commission in the grim, efficient army of Afghanistan; he knew that the only way in which to silence an enemy's artillery is to attack it and that therefore, since the Russians had no guns with which to answer, they would certainly attack on foot, in force, and probably before the amateur gunners found the range. So he concentrated nearly half his force in a position to defend the one gun, and named an Afghan second-in-command whom he could trust to fight desperately.

Then, before any Russian plan could have time to be thought of or develop, he took command of the most important and far the most difficult work himself. He meant to have a true tale for Dick Anthony, and not a patched-up, lame excuse. He meant to have the five remaining guns where no efforts on the Russian part would be able to recapture them, and at the same time where they would be able to produce the most effect; and he meant that Dick Anthony, looking over the battle-field afterward with those all-understanding eyes of his, should be able to see for himself how the play had all been conceived for safety's sake.

Shrewd judge of men, yet Eastern of the East and therefore never able to divorce himself from indirect ideas, he had flung his whole weight, all his ambition, and his last ounce of loyalty into the scale with Dick; and he realized that Dick's good opinion was more worth winning than red gold. Yet he could not bring himself to do what Dick would have done in his shoes—obey implicitly!

He made a bold, brave bid to win before Dick could get back. He did the next best thing to obeying strictly, and picked the next best plan to waiting for Dick's personal leadership. He took five hundred men and set them to dragging the five guns up-hill, through a wild maze of ax-resisting forest, to a point a mile away that overlooked the Russian camp. The guns would be safe there, yet from that point they could lob shells into their midst and make the Russians break for the open. To Dick, on his return, he intended it should look as if the Russians had tried to recapture their artillery; to the Russians it would look like a plan of Dick's to force the fighting, as his way always was; to his own men it would look like Dick's orders being carried out resolutely. To Usbeg Ali himself the plan spelled action, and the chance to prove himself a worthy second-in-command to Dick.

"Forward!" he shouted. "*Haiah!* Engage the enemy more closely!" aping Dick, even in the phrases that he flung to his men in half a dozen languages.

IT WAS a herculean task that he had chosen—a march of a mile that would have sapped the courage of a fanatic, that would have undermined the patience of a mule. He argued that Dick Anthony would not be back for ten days at the least, for he knew nothing of Dick's plan to hurry and whelm the Russian Caspian fleet; he supposed Dick on his way to gallop into Russia, not to steam in on a stolen Russian ship, and even his Afghan imagination could not suggest a means of raiding over the border and being back again in much less than two weeks.

Yet he set himself to beat these Cossacks

Digitized by Google

in two or three days, taking an adage from Dick's mouth that "he wins twice who does it quickly." He used Dick's method, and he took Dick's name in vain twenty times each hour. He swore that Dick had ordered the attack—that Dick had promised huge rewards if the guns were dragged to the summit in a given time—that Dick was hurrying back to praise them, should they succeed.

He was hardly ever still for a moment, ever and again careering back to the main body of his men and riding the rounds of spaced-out companies who watched lest the Russians try to break through to their rear. Like Dick, he seemed ever at the crucial point, yet never in the way, ever ready with his praise, yet never overlooking a mistake or failing to detect laziness. His black beard could never take the place of Dick's clean-shaven chin, nor his turban that of Dick's bare red head; but he made the most of his Mohammedan appeal, and there at least he had an advantage over Dick, for he was surely a true-believer, and what Dick's religion might be no one seemed to know or dared to ask.

"Forward, Moslems!" Usbeg Ali kept urging them. "In the name of Allah! The Russians are all unbelievers! Forward, then, and rid the earth of them!"

Dick never could have urged that claim, whatever other charm he had to make them fight. It was that pluck on the religious string that saved the day, day after day, for Usbeg Ali Khan, keeping his men in such fierce mood that the Cossacks were spiritless compared to them.

Moslems like Usbeg Ali's men, who are mainly rank back-sliders and only in name adherents to the creed, can be whipped into a froth of brave fanaticism and kept so by shrewd flattery and fiery quotations from the Koran; and though Usbeg Ali Khan did not know the Koran all by heart, as many Mohammedans claim to do, he knew at least the vitriolic verses. And he could flatter like a courtier, though with manlier phrases and deadlier results.

DAY after day the five guns crept nearer to the hill-top on a trail torn and hacked through jungle that the Cossacks counted on as part of their defense. The wild beasts could not creep through it; centuries had heaped deep piles of knotted débris underfoot until twenty-foot-thick trees stood waist-high in impenetrable tangle; climate had kept the maze so green it would not burn, and nature had seized on the opportunity to raise her slower-growing, tougher sorts of thorn and creeper. Yet it was through that jungle that Usbeg Ali chose to haul his guns; and Dick Anthony had taught him that where a true commander *wants* to go, his men *must* clear a way; it is all a matter of good leading.

Again and again the Russians made a sortie from their height and tried to reach the one active gun to silence it; but Yussuf Ali, the second-in-command, proved worthy of Usbeg Ali's choice, as he had done once before of Dick's, and sturdily repulsed men whose mere name but a month ago had been enough to make all Persia tremble. The gun still made awfully wild shooting and not more than one shot in a dozen fell near enough to the Russian earthworks to be troublesome; but the shooting did not cease, and the Russians did not dare ignore it, any more than they could fight their way out into the open and bolt for Astrabad.

The fact that only one gun was being used against them led them to the false conclusion that Dick Anthony had captured only one; from that they deduced that the rest of the battery had made good its escape, and it followed logically that within a day or two there would be a strong force coming from Astrabad to their relief. They judged that all they had to do was to hold out; and that seemed easy.

Their commander sent more than one note under cover of a white flag, addressed to Richard Anthony; but Usbeg Ali Khan suspected a ruse to kill Dick, or else to spy out the strength of the attacking force. He was right in both guesses; with Dick dead the Russians would have had little need to fear a force of Persians, and they would not have hesitated to shoot him under cover of a white flag, since there could be nobody to bring the crime home to them afterward. Usbeg Ali read the messages, tore them up, spat—and made the bearers prisoner.

"They ask an armistice!" he laughed. "An armistice—an armistice that would be a half-hour's respite for the lamb when the wolves are hungry! The lamb bleats for the wolves to wait until the shepherds come! Forward, my Moslems! Forward, my true-believers! In the name of Allah the Compassionate, forward with the guns!"

Digitized by Google

It was splendid. He put the military fire into the hearts of men whose habit was rather to wrangle with interminable words, and he made them do what would have been impossible without it. Yet there was something lacking; and though they all could see the logic of his plan and could appreciate the glory of accomplishment, the meanest of them (and there were many very mean men) knew the difference between his authority and Dick's.

They knew they did not dare refuse obedience to either man. They knew that Usbeg Ali Khan was doing his best for them, and they believed him acting in obedience to Dick. And it was not that they missed the music of Andry's bagpipes, though that would have been even more encouraging than Usbeg Ali's shouts. There was something utterly intangible, and to them unexplainable, that proved a greater obstacle to success than even the tough jungle-wood.

Dick himself could not have told them what the difference was, although his mere presence with them would have proved it. With Dick to lead them, there would have been just that extra amount of sting and energy behind their movements to have changed impossibility into actual fact; for Dick led always for the sake of what was right, unselfishly, whereas Usbeg Ali Khan's main motive now was self-aggrandizement.

They were three totally different men, Dick, Usbeg Ali Khan, and Andry. Each knew it; but, whereas Andry was content to give his best to Dick and to serve humbly, knowing Dick the incomparably better man, Usbeg Ali Khan's ambition made him try to steal feathers from Dick's cap and be, if he could, another Richard Anthony.

There was only room in the world for one Dick Anthony, though Dick made no such claim. There was only one man in Persia at that minute who could have taken those four thousand half-trained men and led them to victory over three thousand Russians, drilled, well-officered, and trenched on a steep hill. That one man, at that minute, happened to have rid the Caspian of Russian ships and to be landing again on the southern Caspian shore.

ON THE fourth day of Usbeg Ali's nearly superhuman effort, Dick was already hurrying to help him, thinking only of how soon he might cover the distance, and, between arguments with the Princess, studying a plan of attack that would reduce the Russians in a minimum of time. He more than half believed that Usbeg Ali would obey him and content himself with hemming in the Russians; yet he rather feared the opposite.

Should it prove that Usbeg Ali had obeyed, and that the Cossacks were growing weary of confinement, he decided he would send a note to the Russian commandant under cover of a white flag, explaining all that had happened and the hopelessness of the position. He had never yet shed blood, or caused it to be shed, without doing his best first to avoid the necessity for fighting.

So he hurried, and the horses of his squadron streamed sweat that took on a deep coat of dust and made them seem all one color.

So the women who rode with him had to call on all their reserve of strength.. So Andry, clinging to his saddle and swearing Gaelic oaths, reeled and rolled in efforts to adjust his sore anatomy to less excruciating angles.

So, too, belly-to-the-earth, a big Australian mare of the Indian Army type thundered and sobbed beneath a Rajput *sowar* in her efforts to catch up.

The *sowar* rode from Teheran, and as a man rides whose honor hangs in the balance of accomplishment. The end of his turban was between his teeth, to keep the dust out of his throat; his heavy saber lay across the pommel, held in both hands to prevent it banging on the horse's flank. He was up in the stirrups, leaning forward, riding as few but Rajputs can; and, as the way of that fierce fighting race is always, he had managed to communicate his own mood to the animal he rode.

As if Hell and its angels were behind him, instead of a mere task in front, he came like the hot wind, riding light, and gaining two for one.

He was stopped, of course, by the rearguard. A bullet, since the courtesies of peace had been suspended, kicked up the dust within eight inches of his horse's feet, and he reined in with a grin, throwing his weight back in the saddle and looking now like the sole proprietor of all the honor in a prideful world.

He did not speak when they demanded why he rode in such a hurry, but he showed

Digitized by Google

a letter, and a letter, all through the East, is an infinitely better key than argument. They took his saber; a man on either side of him seized a rein, and in a moment they were guiding his leg-weary horse full-pelt past the squadron to the front, where Dick rode.

"Halt!" commanded Dick, throwing up an arm the moment he was overtaken, and the horses dropped their heads all together, blowing like a school of porpoises.

"Give him his saber back!" he ordered, frowning.

The Rajput took his saber in silence, but saluted Dick. Then he held his letter out, and Dick tore it open, trembling a little as he saw that the envelope was stamped from the British Ministry at Teheran. His emotion was excitement, undiluted. This, he told himself, would be recognition at last. This would be some statement to the effect that word had come from home, and that he might surrender at the British Legation and be heard in self-defense. Before he read a line of the letter he thanked God that he had done nothing unworthy of the Anthonys of Arran, but the reverse, untiringly.

This time the letter was addressed to Mr. Richard Anthony, and Dick's eyes laughed, for a former letter from the same source had been unaddressed, and had commenced with "My dear man." But that was all the comfort that it held for Dick, and the watching Rajput noticed that the color of his eyes appeared to change three times while he read on. The Rajput noticed too that Dick's knuckles whitened from the strain of tightening fingers. The letter ran:

DEAR MR. ANTHONY:

Since you prefer to call yourself, and be addressed, by that name.

"Damn!" Dick muttered.

In a letter addressed to the British Minister here, you made claim to be a British subject, and to the right to surrender at this Legation, to be heard in your own defense on the various charges made against you by the Russian Government. Since the authorities at home have notified us, in reply to our inquiry, of the death of Richard Anthony of Arran, it is not possible to admit your claim either in fact or by implication; but your letter seems to prove sincere affection for your country, and there seems no doubt at all of your nationality, whatever your real name may be.

You are therefore notified that Great Britain, France, and Russia, as allies, are at war with Germany and Austria.

You are invited to consider what the duty is of each and every Englishman under the circumstances.

You are reminded that the further continuance of your ill-advised campaign against Russia must in the nature of things to some extent at least interfere with the employment of all Russia's available strength against England's enemies.

The following guarantee is therefore made to you in absolute good faith, and with the connivance of the Russian Government:

Should you discontinue your efforts against Russia, and report at this Legation immediately after receipt of this communication, you are promised a free passage out of Persia in any direction you care to take, except toward Russia. No efforts will be made, either by the British or Russian Governments, to bring you to trial, nor will any further steps be taken to bring you to account.

In the event of your wishing to discuss this offer in person, before availing yourself of it, a period of one week is allowed you, during which the Russian Minister has given assurance that no steps will be taken against you, unless of a defensive nature made necessary by action on your part. At any time during the week which follows your receipt of this letter you will be met at any point you may decide on outside of Teheran, and an official verbal assurance will be added to this written one.

But, should you continue on your present course, you are hereby notified that, as the ally and friend of Russia, the British Government will use its best effort to bring you to account.

An attempt to approach Teheran with a considerable armed force would be interpreted as an act of enmity on your part.

In the hope that your good sense and your loyalty to England will combine to induce you to take advantage of an opportunity which otherwise could never be available, I have the honor to be, sir,

Your obedient servant,

H. J. OMMONEY,
Assist. Secretary of Legation.

Dick's lips grew thin and his cheeks white beneath the tan, as he read what was virtually his excommunication. Until now he had not doubted for an instant his ultimate ability to prove his real identity; he had felt sure, too, that sooner or later he would be able to establish his innocence. He had dealt savagely with Russia, but from motives and with excuse that were in every instance unassailable. The guilty party had been always Russia.

Now, in the teeth of the amazing, unexpected fact of European war, with Russia and England hand-in-hand in an unnatural alliance, he saw—as a man sees Fate's finger writing on a wall—his doom to utter outlawry and endless unrecognition. Even the offer to explain at greater length was not from the British Minister, who might have recognized him, but from an underling, who would be too full of self-impor-

Digitized by Google

tance and self-righteousness to understand more than the gulf now fixed between them.

His strange eyes glowed, and all the pride of all the Anthonys surged through his veins to sing in his head and bid him send back hot defiance. He would not have been the first Anthony, by many and many a man, to be a thorn in England's side; more than one Anthony had ridden into England under more than one Pretender, and had left his mark on British history before he died.

But, being Richard Anthony—last and least passionate, though noblest of the clan—he thought of the Persians who had chosen him to lead them, and of the blood that they would have to shed should he let hot temper lead him now. It seemed to him that there might be another, middle course, by which Persia might be free in any event. If he could rid Persia of the Russian yoke, he would ride away content, and die anywhere Fate chose, in anonymous oblivion.

"Ride back!" he ordered the Rajput. "Say, I'll come and talk it over!"

"A letter, sahib! Give me a letter to take!"

"No! Tell 'em I'll come! Tell 'em to meet me. Let the password be 'Is it peace, Jehu?' I'll answer 'Peace!' "

"That is no message, sahib, to take to a Legation!" said the Rajput truculently.

"It is all I send!" said Dick. "Squadron! Ter-r-r-r-r-ot—March!"

Four hundred horses jingled on the instant in his wake, and the Rajput sat in their dust, staring at Dick's back.

"That is the voice, and the eye, and the manner of a *Man!*" he muttered.

He sat his tired horse, muttering to himself, until all Dick's dusty squadron had clattered past him and the jeers of the last few files, who thought Dick's manner evidence of the Rajput's meanness, had died away. Then suddenly he seemed to recollect his senses and his duty. As suddenly his mare's trembling legs drew taut again. As if man and beast were actuated by the selfsame thought, and that thought instant, he was all at once off in a thundering stride, hell-pelting after Dick and elbowing out of the way the supernumeraries who cantered on the flank.

He caught Dick in ten minutes of hard riding, and Dick turned to look at him with growing interest. His born ability to recognize a good man told him he had treated this *sowar* a bit too cavalierly, and had visited disappointment on the man who least deserved ill treatment.

"Halt!" he ordered, flinging up his hand; and again the squadron thundered to a standstill. Again he and the Rajput eyed each other as one lion eyes another across a kill.

"I, too, am a man," said the Rajput slowly, speaking Persian.

Dick nodded.

"I brought a letter."

Niggard of spoken words, Dick nodded again.

"I have a right to proof that I delivered it."

"A soldier's word should be worth more than written evidence," said Dick, for he was interested. An uncle of his, an Anthony, had fought in Rajputana, and had brought home tales of Rajput derring-do and pride that all unintentionally had formed a most important part of Richard's education; it is the tales a boy remembers, and not the school-taught ritual, that mold the man who is to be.

"A soldier's promise to bring back an answer—is that worth nothing?" asked the Rajput, eying Dick's basket-hilted sword and its beryl flashing in the sun. "I will fight you for a written answer!"

"You shall have one," answered Dick, feeling in his pocket for something to write with. He had nothing of the kind, but the Rajput handed him a fountain pen and paper.

Dick wrote, resting the paper on a rifle butt that a front file laid across his saddle:

> Would to God there were one man in authority at your Legation who had half this Rajput's sense! Then there might be somebody to recognize me when I come! I shall come, by the main road from the west, as soon as I have relieved two Russian regiments, now surrounded. I shall come in a hurry, with a few men. Meet me anywhere along the road. Let the password be "Is it peace, Jehu?" and the answer "Peace!" I have an offer I will make, so let the man who meets me have full authority to accept or decline. DICK ANTHONY.

The Rajput, seeing he had finished writing, held his hand out.

"Give me an envelope," said Dick.

The *sowar* shook his head. "I am no village letter-writer, summoned from the shade of a *baobab*," he laughed. "I have neither envelope nor stamp."

Dick folded up the letter and passed it to him.

Digitized by Google

"The contents are for the eyes of the Secretary of Legation," he said quietly.

"He shall be the first to read it," said the *sowar*, thrusting the letter into a pocket inside his tunic.

Then Dick did what he should have done before, and what he was ashamed of not having done. He offered the *sowar* the pick of all the horses in the squadron. But the *sowar* shook his head.

"There is no horse in the world that I would take in exchange for this mare of mine!" he answered.

"Who said exchange?" asked Dick.

So the *sowar* eyed the squadron horses, and selected one that seemed less travel-weary than the rest. Dick made the man who rode it mount behind another man, and the *sowar* changed the saddle over from his mare. He mounted, saluted Dick, and then rode back along his way on a horse that bore the brand of the Russian Government and a Cossack regiment, leading his Waler mare.

"One thousand men like that one," muttered Dick, "and I think I could make Asia hold her head up and be free!"

AS HE led his squadron on again along the road toward the mountains, looking back once or twice at the Rajput *sowar* whom a few days of rough traveling would reintroduce to ordered decorum and social levels rigidly defined, Dick's feelings were too mixed and his emotions too intense to bear definition. All that that *sowar* would enjoy, of dignity and recognition, would not amount to the hundredth part of what were Dick's, by right of birth and honest effort; yet the last of the Anthonys was an outlaw, and seemed likely to remain one!

The full, tremendous meaning of the message sent him dawned on him gradually, as he recalled what he had done to Russia and that that sovereign power was willing to forego revenge. From the day when he had forced the captain of a Russian ship to do his bidding down to this minute his every encounter with Russian authority had begun with defiance on his part, and had ended in Russia's worsting.

In Russia itself he had cut his way through the ranks of a regiment. He had crossed the Caspian in a stolen Russian boat. Here in Persia he had cut up a regiment; later, he had forced it to surrender, and had sent it back weaponless, in shame, to Astrabad. He had burst into Astrabad, and at his bidding the inhabitants had burned the Russian barracks. He had burst open a Russian jail and had set the prisoner free. He had captured a battery of Russian guns. And now, backed by the very elements, he had swept the Caspian clear of Russian ships. Yet Russia was ready to forget, if not forgive!

Truly, this must be a war! Russia must be in dire straits before——

He found himself arguing against himself, unable to believe that any straits would make the Russian bear guileless. His thought took another line. England must be in dire straits before she would let her Minister consent, even through his assistant secretary, to such an offer as had just been made him! But England and Russia were allies, and at war with Germany. He could not make himself believe that Germany, with Austria to help, could worry England, France and Russia into making such a compact after what could have been at most but a week or two of war. The Princess Olga Karageorgovich had had no news of war, for he asked her, and she had been in communication with Petersburg within the week.

"War in Europe would be Asia's opportunity!" he told himself; and that thought brought others.

The Princess, laughing at the guards who shouted to her to keep between them, spurred forward beside Dick, and looked up at him with an expression on her face that was the quintessence of confidential comradeship. She all but took him off his guard; but in time—in the nick of time—he remembered that a she-leopard is always a she-leopard, though her spots seem beautiful. He had to tell himself three times that she was his enemy, before he could forget her loveliness and what seemed love-light in her violet eyes.

"May I know the news?" she asked him in a voice that would have disarmed a scorpion.

"No," he said curtly; so she drew back to her place again amid her muttering guards.

Once a she-leopard, always one! How, then, about a bear? Was the Russian bear become trustworthy all at once because of an alliance and a common cause with England? Had Russia ever ceased, even in time of war, to scheme and plan and trick?

Digitized by Google

Had nations grown less selfish, because Germany had shown her hand at last and had begun to use the saber she had rattled so often? It seemed to Dick, hurrying his squadron through the foothills, that the guile of Tartar counsels underlay that plea that sought to seduce him out of Persia.

Had he not promised the Persians he would lead them, and that he would stay with them until they were free of the Russian yoke, or he were dead? Was that promise canceled because Germany and England were at war? Back came his thoughts again to that initial one, that "war in Europe might be Asia's opportunity!" And, if Asia's, Russia's! For Russia overlies the whole of Asia, and considers Asia little else than Russia's destiny!

He began to wonder whither destiny was leading him, Dick Anthony, who had always prayed to be a soldier, and who had been denied. For the first time now it began to dawn on him that he was more of a soldier, in more absolute command, than ever any Anthony had been. It had been denied him to lead his father's kilted regiment or to take his father's place in his nation's counsels; but here was another nation he might serve, and it began to look to him as if destiny, perhaps, were making him its savior.

Dick's modesty was of the enduring sort that only let such personal deductions reach him last of all, when all the other explanations of a fact had been tried in turn and found no good. Yet his courage was of the undiluted and unblinking type that made him face his own conclusions and admit them and their consequences.

It seemed to him, as he led at his usual reckless speed across an untamed countryside with four hundred men behind him who were foreigners by birth, creed, training, habit, and ideals, that it had been no scheming of his that had set him where he was, nor any choice of his; therefore—the conclusion grew more definite each minute—he had a right to make the utmost and the utmost best for himself and all concerned out of the situation. And what was right was all he ever cared about.

Soon conclusion was conviction. Soon his most extraordinary eyes were blazing with the light of a new understanding and a new determination. Then, as always when he had his basic fact to build on, he began searching swiftly in his mind for ways and means of using what he had to hand for what he had to do.

He had men and horses. He had captured Russian guns. And he had Andry. Andry Macdougal was a godsend, neither more nor less, though likely to be rendered less efficient by the presence of his sweetheart; Andry was the essence of all loyalty, and an excellent, tremendous fighting man. Andry was more than a mere asset: he was part and parcel of the game itself.

It was the Princess who puzzled him. What use could he make of a woman who had betrayed him, over and again, that she might have him for her own; who did not dare go back to Russia, because she had betrayed the Russian secret government; who was likely to betray him again, and Russia again, and certainly herself at the first chance-given opportunity to wet her tigerish desire; who was young, beautiful, and gifted, and so well taught in the art of deceiving men that enemy and friend alike were likely to be fooled by her, and any plan that included her was likely to be spoiled by her treacherous arts? Unless he used her, and remorselessly, she would almost certainly use him. What could he do with her?

His thoughts were interrupted by the sound of cannonading far ahead, and the very distant rattle of small-arms firing independently. Once, against the dark of distant trees, he caught sight of a cannon's flash, and then he heard the answering hell-stutter of two machine-guns.

"I might have known that Usbeg Ali could not wait!" he muttered. "Damn the man!"

Then he leaned back in the saddle, and his voice, that had no music in it but a whole story full of wonderful appeal, rang long and loud, so that the last man of the trotting squadron heard it and awoke from reverie.

"Squadron—wake up, now! Gather your horses together! Form twos! Like the devil, now! Gallop!"

They answered him like men awaking from a dream, and in a moment the long line was streaming out behind him, up and down hill, over water-courses, in and out around huge rocks and dodging under trees, no longer thundering with an ordered squadron's din but sweeping along as a hailstorm goes, and sparing neither horse nor rider in their hurry to help Usbeg Ali Khan.

Digitized by Google

III

SO A Cossack look-out in the top branches of a walnut-tree spied the glint of sun on steel and mistook Dick Anthony's oncoming squadron for the vanguard of a relieving force. He shouted the good news down to his commander, and Colonel Ivanoff sent two more men up into the tree-tops, lending one of them his own binoculars.

Dick's horses were Russian; the rifles were Russian; and under Dick's leadership the men rode at least as recklessly as Cossacks. The look-outs had excuse for confirming the first man's report; the man with the glasses shouted down that he could see two women riding with the force, and that was enough to assure the Colonel that the new arrivals were from Astrabad, and Russian. Who else but the Princess Olga Karageorgovich could the woman be? And did she ever go anywhere without her maid?

Unlike the great majority of Russia's officers along her far-spread frontiers, Colonel Ivanoff was not a mere incompetent sent off to escape his creditors, nor yet an undesirable whose crimes had been too insignificant and mean to call for serious notice. He happened to be a man who took his profession seriously and who judged every situation from a military point of view.

Horsemen, coming at a gallop, could be but the advance guard of a relieving force, he argued; and he remembered that there were not very many cavalry in Astrabad; the horsemen must be few. But he judged that the approach of Cossacks would be just as disconcerting to his Persian enemy, and to Dick Anthony whom he still supposed in command of the attacking force, as it was reassuring to himself, and he proposed to take immediate advantage of consternation in the Persian ranks.

He heard the shouts of the besiegers as they, too, got word of the arrivals. Drawn on a rough map in front of him, he had a chart that showed exactly how far Usbeg Ali's men had dragged the five guns, for men posted in other tree-tops had reported to him yard by yard the progress made, and he had heard for himself the noise of axes and the shouting. What he did not know was that there were five guns there, and he only supposed that they were making a trail for the one gun, which was meanwhile belching occasional ill-directed shots at his position.

It was quite clear to him that should that one gun ever reach the hill-top toward which Usbeg Ali's efforts aimed, shooting with it would be almost infinitely easier, and his position would become untenable or nearly so. Also, it was gall and wormwood to him that any relieving force should find him being pounded by one of the guns he had originally been supposed to escort.

He decided at once to sally in force. He laid his finger on the chart, called half a dozen of his subordinates, and pointed out his plan to them.

"There must be several hundred men up that road they are cutting," he explained. "They can only get out of it by the way that they went in, for the jungle is too thick for any other course. If we can strike at this point—here—we shall cut the force in halves, one half up their jungle trail and the other outside it. Our move will bottle up however many men they have got in the jungle and, with them corked in, the rest will be that much easier to deal with. Get our machine-guns here, cover our advance with them in the direction of that cannon. Call in our men from the rear. Concentrate on this point, and in this direction. Now! Hear them shouting? Now is the time! Now, hurry!"

THERE was nothing desultory about the sudden Russian change of front and charge. They came, when they did come, like an avalanche, spring-loosed from their hill-top, and within five minutes of the start they had thrust themselves between Usbeg Ali, with his guns and his five hundred, and his main body who were drawn up to defend the other gun. It was then, for the first time, that the Russians became aware of the other five guns, and then that the fancy seized them to recapture all six guns, instead of merely one, before what they thought was their relief could reach them.

Bugles and hoarse shouts told of an altered plan. Crashing undergrowth proclaimed a changing front. In a matter of seconds Usbeg Ali Khan was shut in at the far end of a path that he had cut, and impenetrable jungle hedged him in tight.

"Surrender!" yelled the Cossacks, from the open end.

Digitized by Google

"Stand by the guns in the name of Allah!" thundered Usbeg Ali.

"Charge! Charge in and get them!" roared a Russian officer.

In a moment all hell was loose, and Usbeg Ali Khan was putting into practise lessons in true leadership that he had learned from Richard Anthony. Somehow, by dint of awful effort and a self-control that is the only key to the control of men, he contrived to get his men crouched behind the guns and hidden down the sides of his rough-hewn jungle glade, so that the volley sent whistling at them by kneeling Cossacks spattered and rattled on the guns but did little serious harm. And it was answered by an independent fire that sent the Russians reeling back for shelter.

Then, instead of facing two ways to defend themselves from the Russian charge and the attack of new arrivals, the main body of Dick's Persians recognized Dick's red head and Andry's rolling seat on a horse. They let loose a cheer that crashed through the jungle like the Last Trump; and like a gaining tide they surged forward at the Russians.

It was the Russians then who faced two ways at once and the Russians who lost courage.

In his glade Usbeg Ali Khan fought like a black rat in a hole. One gun he managed to get faced about and aimed at the Russians. With a last-ditch wit that is the heritage of fighting men, he found amid his crowd a man who knew enough to load the gun, and with his own hands he got the limber open and a charge of grape ready.

The grape went whining down the glade, at a range that precluded missing, and a ghastly crimson gap lay open through the Russian midst. Then with a roar of defiance the Cossacks formed again and surged down the glade at the charge before the amateurs could possibly reload. As many Cossacks as could crowd into the jungle lane were at hand-grips with Usbeg Ali's men when Dick's newcomers joined the main body and Dick himself sought high ground somewhere, anywhere, from which to sum up the situation and take charge of it. He tried a tree, but could see nothing from the top of it. He tried a ridge that ran through the jungle east and west, but there was no hole through the thicket that a jackal could have used.

There were only three roads—one that Usbed Ali Khan had cut, and in which he fought now like the king of hell at bay; one down which the Russians came in force; and one up which his own main body surged. They all three met together, and at the junction of them, in a natural forest clearing less than two acres in extent, they were having it out at hand-grips, to the tune of two machine-guns that were "browning" all concerned with bloody impartiality.

"Andry!" roared Dick, and the Scotsman laid a hand on his shoulder; he was in his place where he ought to be, one yard behind.

"Get your pipes out—get 'em going—any tune!"

There was no need to run and get the pipes; Andry had them ready. In a moment *Cock o' the North* was screaming through the trees, and Usbeg Ali, down in his death-trap, knew that Dick had come.

"Hey, Persians!" he shouted. "Another of Allah's sendings! Dee-k-Anthonee! Dee-k-Anthonee is here! The battle is ours! Forward, in the name of Allah! Charge!"

DICK forced his way through the swarm of the main body, and the Russians reeled away in front of him. Where Dick was, with his bare red head and that two-edged sword that had been his ancestor's, there was a spirit, too, that flowed through his men's veins and made warriors of weaklings. And where he went strode Andry, the gigantic, making music of a kind that mocks at fear. Section by section the Russians yielded and gave ground; and since they were commanded by a soldier who was worth his keep they fell back stolidly, in order enough to be ugly. There was only one line open along which they could retreat, and so they took it, up the hill behind them to the trenched camp they had left.

Soon their machine-guns ceased stuttering for fear of decimating their own men. Soon the main body of them had been driven past the entrance to Usbeg Ali's trap and, the pressure gone from behind them, those up the trap were driven headlong back out of it in front of Usbeg Ali's furious charge.

Sullenly, then, but in decent order, the Cossacks retreated up their hill, leaving behind them twenty or more per cent. of

Digitized by Google

their number dead and dying or else wounded too seriously to drag themselves along. Behind them, up the hill, there crawled a line of wounded, belly-downward, who preferred the agony of movement to the chance of Persian mercy or the risk of being left to the attention of the jungle-ants.

"You came in the nick of time, *bahadur?*" said the voice of Usbeg Ali Khan, and his white teeth smiled between his black mustache and beard as Dick looked round at him.

"Who started the fight?" asked Dick.

"*Bahadur*, I——"

"That'll do!" said Dick. He could detect the shadow of a coming lie before it came, and Usbeg Ali lowered his eyes, for Dick's were as he had never seen them yet. They did not blaze, nor were they cold; they seemed blended of pity, disappointment, understanding, all in one, and to a man who knew himself at fault they were not good to gaze into.

"Lay out the dead and wounded!" ordered Dick.

Glad of an excuse to break away, Usbeg Ali ran to busy himself about a duty he would never have soiled his hands with otherwise. He liked the fighting and the leadership, but not the shambles afterward.

IT WAS an hour before the tale was told in full and the lines of dead and wounded lay beneath the trees in the clearing where the three tracks met.

"Have you counted them?" asked Dick.

"Which? The dead or the wounded?"

"Dead — wounded—Persian—Russian—all of them. How many?"

"*Bahadur*, there lie five hundred and nine Russian dead and wounded, two hundred and ninety-seven of our men—all told, both together——"

"Eight hundred and six!" said Dick. "And my order when I left you was 'let there be no fighting!'"

Usbeg Ali did not answer him. When it came to the point it seemed never any use to lie to Dick.

"Now go. Take a white flag. Climb that hill and tell the Russian commandant that he may go free, with the honors of war!"

"*Bahadur*——!"

"Do as I say!"

"*Bahadur*—he will ask me why!"

"Tell him Russia, France and England are at war with Germany and Austria. Tell him I will not fight England's friends! Do as I order you! Go!"

Dazed, like a drunken man, and much less than half convinced, Usbeg Ali Khan attached a torn shirt to a stick and staggered up the hill.

IV

NEEDLESS to say, the Russian commandant smelled more than one rat; he smelled half a dozen of them. He did not believe, in the first place, that there was any European war, for he had had no news of even the likelihood of one when he left Astrabad only a few days before. He did believe that he was likely soon to be relieved, and he was sure that he needed only hold out where he was for a day or two until troops could hurry to his aid from over the Caspian.

He knew nothing of Dick's clean sweep that had changed the Caspian from a Russian lake to any man's sea again. And he did believe in Russia's long, strong arm. He believed firmly, implicitly, beyond chance of contradiction, that Dick Anthony had news of a relief force coming; and he laughed aloud at the idea of going free. He meant he would hold Dick Anthony engaged until the relief force came, and meanwhile he decided to make use of argument.

"This is no war," he answered arrogantly. "There are no honors of war I can recognize that an outlaw has to offer! Tell your master to give me back those stolen guns, if he wants to treat with me. Go, tell him that!"

"I dare not!" answered Usbeg Ali Khan.

"Tell him, then, that when I come out of here it will be without his leave!"

"*Bismillah!*" answered Usbeg Ali, flashing his white teeth and thrusting his sword-hilt forward. "There was no Dee-k-Anthonee here until a while ago, yet we all but routed you. Now, with him here, and his leave to use those guns against you, I promise you the treatment that a ringed wolf gets! Allah the Compassionate has made my master offer you his charity. Take it or leave it. Take leave to go or leave to lie here and be cracked up by the jackals! *Bismillah*—what should we care!"

"Tell him to send those guns up here, and I will treat with him," the Colonel answered, turning on his heel. And, since a company of Cossacks covered him with rifles and made ready to fire a volley at the

Digitized by Google

word, Usbeg Ali spun on his heel with the haughtiness that few know so well as Afghans how to assume and started down the hill.

To his amazement, Dick did not order the resumption of hostilities at once. Instead, he made another white flag, gave it to a Persian, sent the man with it ahead of him uphill, and followed alone, on horseback. The commandant came out to meet him, and the two men eyed each other for a minute, under the eyes of thousands—Cossacks peering over earthworks from above and, from below, Persians staring wide-eyed from between the trunks and limbs of trees.

"What is it?" asked the commandant at last, strangely at a loss for words in the presence of this outlaw whom he had affected to despise.

"I have news, direct from the British Minister at Teheran," said Dick, "of a European war in which England, France and Russia are allies against Austria and Germany. As an Englishman, I offer you undisputed right of way back into Russia."

"I don't believe a word of it!"

"Oh, yes you do!" said Dick.

They were speaking English, for most educated Russians can converse in that and several other tongues; and Dick did not choose to have it known that he knew Russian.

"I need proof of it!"

Dick had a letter in his pocket that would have proved his assertion to the hilt, but it was not his way to lay bare to an enemy the secrets that lay nearest to his heart. Non-recognition of his true claim to be Dick Anthony of Arran was black shame, to him if not to other people, of a kind he would wipe out before he spoke of it. So he let the letter lie where it was, in an inside pocket of a torn shirt.

"You mean you want proof that I'm not afraid to fight?"

"Bah!" said the Russian. "Your rabble could not take my position in a hundred years! But give me those six guns back, and I'll grant your request!"

"What request?" asked Dick.

"Your request for a truce."

Dick smiled, and it was evident to Colonel Ivanoff that he had chosen the wrong line. Generally, with a young man such as Dick, and when the young man makes the first advances, the upper hand is the better one to take and the more impudently the young man is browbeaten the sooner he will yield; for he will either lose his temper or lose courage, and in either case is damned.

"Let's fight and get it over, then!" said Dick, so quietly and so casually that the Russian gasped. "Come and get your guns! I'm going to train them on you from that gap. Hoist a white flag when you've had enough of it. Good-by."

THE Russian did not answer. Nor did he speak. Usbeg Ali's subsequent contention that the Colonel was author of the crime, as well as to blame for it, was due like many another of the Afghan's errors to a wild imagination. What did happen was that the Colonel turned on his heel and hurried back toward the nearest earthwork, and the men lined up behind it took his gesture for an order.

"Fire!" yelled an officer in Russian.

A volley burst out in a livid line of flame from over the earth redout. Dick's charger reared, up-ended—leaped into the air in a convulsive death spasm—and fell backward on the top of Dick, spurting blood from twenty places.

"Fire!" yelled an officer again.

A second volley plunked into the horse. The beast quivered and was still. Dick writhed. And then a yell that rent the forest burst from the Persian lines below, and through the yell there danced and lifted suddenly a tune to which hordes have hurried many a hundred time to the relief.

"The Campbells are comin', Oho, Oho!" played Andry.

"Ye have seen!" yelled Usbeg Ali Khan.

"Blood!"

It was a sudden, awful sound that burst unprompted from four thousand throats together. It was like the bursting, prisoned wrath of Asia, detonated by the sight of treachery to the man who had taught a new way of winning freedom. And the wave, the hurricane, the rising, upward flowing, scorching blast that came next from the woods seemed to the waiting Russians like the wrath of God let go.

"Allah! In the name of Allah!"

Nobody thought any longer of the guns, nor of any other thing than how to cross the space between him and the enemy in shortest time and glut, with steel in yielding flesh, his savage hunger for revenge. For

Digitized by Google

they thought Dick dead. In that second they knew, as none of them had known yet, what Dick had been to them and what of hope, and unity, and new, unselfish plan his life and leadership had meant.

The madness, that has gripped whole nations before now, of blood-guilt intent on justifying murder, seized the Russians and they surged across their earthwork in a wave that met the Persian wave half-way. Unbitted, uncontrolled, unreasoning, they lost all sense of discipline or drill, and fought with fixed bayonets, teeth, sabers, hands and feet, for what was supposed to be Dick's carcass.

Russians dragged the horse away from him. Persians lifted him. It was Andry's rifle, clubbed, that scattered a way through Persian and Russian alike, whirling and beating, brain-beastly, to be flung at last like a thunderbolt into the Russian ranks while the huge man seized Dick in his arms and hugged him, sobbing "Laddie, laddie! What hae they done to ye?"

IT WAS in Andry's iron arms that his breath came back to Dick, and his brain, stunned by the fall, recovered consciousness. And then, since he was weak still and could scarcely shout or stand, it was hoisted on Andry's shoulders that Dick led his Persians on, up the hill, and over the Russian trenches. Andry carried him with the strength of a horse and the care of a Scots nurse for a babe in arms; and he set him down on the summit of the hill, to feel him over with huge, searching hands for bullet wounds.

"Have they killed ye? Have they hur-r-rt ye? Ar-r-re ye live an' weel? Laddie—speak me a piece! Say that ye're no sae verra sairly woundit!"

The giant was on his knees beside Dick, groping with his hands inside Dick's shirt, feeling him rib by rib, and growing more excited every second as it dawned on him that a miracle had happened and Dick was not hurt at all, but only a little stunned and shaken.

"Stop the fighting if you can!" Dick panted; and the big man got up on his feet, to look around him and, if he might, obey. Dick's voice had not come back to him—the crashing, piercing voice that had no note of music in it but could ring through the raging of a battle and be heard.

Borne off their feet and carried backward by the weight of Persian wrath, the Cossacks were at bay, surrounded, cut up into small detachments, giving ground, and fighting with the wild-eyed fear that knows no hope of quarter. The hill-top was a shambles, slippery with blood, and the din was the noise of hell, that drowned all orders and all efforts to command.

"Laddie, ye might stop steers that had sniffed the smell o' bluid—but yon's no' a stampede—yon's a lan'slide!"

But Dick had recovered. Clean living of a life long, exercise, and open air had told, and the elasticity of youth won out against the effect of shock. As suddenly as it had left him all his self-command returned, and with it came again his almost superhuman power to grip men's minds and bend them to the line of his own choosing.

Now his voice went ringing through the din. Now his strength was back, and he was here, there, everywhere, wherever the fight raged fiercest; and strangely enough his sword, that had led the Persians so often to swift victory, was busy now fighting for the Russians. He beat his own men with the flat of it. He beat them to their knees. Guarded from behind by Andry, he attacked them when they would not listen, and forced them to give ground in front of him, sparring sullenly in self-defense.

And then, as the fight died down, and only small sporadic skirmishes at distant points continued like the waning embers of a scattered fire, Usbeg Ali and a dozen men came struggling toward Dick, carrying Colonel Ivanoff legs upward, fighting for sheer blasphemous disgust with his loss of dignity. His face was on the earth, but his arms and his legs were busy dealing desperately with his captors.

Bleeding, they up-ended him, holding his arms and giving him no chance to wipe away the bloody mud that smeared his face.

"Can you gather your men?" Dick asked him; but he did not answer.

"Loose him!" ordered Dick; and to every one's amazement the Colonel stood still, helpless, utterly unable to speak, move, or think apparently, now that he was loosed, although the men who loosed him each could show the marks of his iron fingers.

"Gather your wounded and go!" said Dick.

"Give me my guns!"

Dick did not smile. He drove his two-edged sword home into its scabbard, and

Digitized by Google

turned aside to think what he should do or say to a man crazed by defeat and shame. And as he turned he heard Andry swear a deep Scots oath behind him. His eyes sought Andry's—followed their line—and saw the French maid, Marie Mouquin, running uphill, dodging dead bodies and the arms of wounded men stretched out to clutch her skirts. Andry stepped out to start toward her, but Dick held out a restraining hand.

"Let her come," he ordered; and they both stood still, wondering.

"She has gone!" said the maid. "She has taken a horse! She has ridden away!"

"Who?"

Both men voiced the question, though both knew who the only woman in the world was who could make trouble for them in that moment.

"The Princess! She! Olga Karageorgovich!"

"Ha-ha! Ha-ha! Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ho!" laughed Colonel Ivanoff. The news revived his fainting wits; he had forgotten that his look-out in the tree-top had reported Olga Karageorgovich in the arriving force. "Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ho!" He held his sides. He sat down on the end of an earth redout, and stretched his legs in front of him to enjoy better the revulsion of sensation that swept over him.

"The baa-lamb caught the she-wolf, but forgot to hold her. Ho-ho-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ho! Now for the last chapter! She can bear more malice than a pig has lice!"

He did not know how utterly the Princess had already damned herself in the suspicious eyes of Russia, for he was not one of the men in touch with the secret government. He had only laughed a hundred times, in common with a hundred officers, at the notorious passion of the Princess Olga Karageorgovich for Dick—had guessed a hundred times at what would be the outcome—and roared now at the thought of the emotions that would rankle in her mind while she rode like the hot wind back to Astrabad, and the humor of it took the sting out of defeat, and left him tractable.

DICK had no more difficulty with him. The Persians made stretchers out of boughs and laid the Russian wounded on them; the Cossacks lifted them, and with the Colonel at their head on his own horse they trudged down to the plain and to the track leading eastward for Astrabad. Dick kept back no plunder, but even let them take away their two machine-guns.

The Russians held a burying of dead on the plain, and the whine of Cossack hymns wound back with the East wind through the trees to where Dick stood bareheaded at the end of a long trench, counting his Persian dead who lay with faces toward Mecca. The trench had been dug for another purpose by a Russian enemy, and Andry's bagpipes were the orchestra that played their requiem. After the final volleys, while the sods were being tossed into the trench, "Lochaber No More" wailed over them, like a thread of silver running through the thoughts of East and West alike, knitting them into one mutual understanding and regard.

"Up to the hills!" Dick ordered then.

Half of the men had left their possessions cached in Dick's mountain aerie, where the campaign for Persia's freedom had been given its initial impetus. There was room in that amphitheater for seven or eight thousand men, and water in the middle of it; held by five hundred men, not twenty thousand with artillery could ever have taken it, unless by slow starvation, for there were no crags that commanded it, nor any positions from which guns could search it out. The approaches were narrow, steep and few; they could be swept as with hail by converging rifle-fire.

It suited Dick, in that minute when his fate and most of Persia's seemed hanging in the balance, to do the opposite to what would be expected of him, and gather his clans together in that first sky-nestling camp. Now, if there was anything in all this news of war, of Russia's anxiety to call off her troops, and of England's so dire need that she must offer to treat with a proclaimed outlaw, was the time when a man would strike swiftly and smite hard, thought Usbeg Ali Khan, already speculating on the nature and extent of the loot in Teheran bazaars.

But Dick preferred to weld his force together, and to lead it to the place where it could be of least immediate use to anybody but itself. Newcomers were flocking hourly to him, all undrilled, though nearly all of them well armed; and all the newcomers were burdened with unwarlike luggage. His losses, of drilled men seasoned under

Digitized by Google

fire, had been terrific, especially in this last bungling engagement, and to make those losses good would mean not merely numbers but tireless teaching of new men. It seemed very good to Dick to hurry his growing swarm into the hills before it grew too unwieldy, to give his wounded the benefit of mountain air, and to let his new men cache their belongings in a place that would give them a sense of headquarters in common.

A WEAKER, unwiser man would have led a rabble forward, and have let it plunder on its way, to create panic and excuse for more exacting terms. But the only weak joint in all Dick's armor was his quixotic regard for women.

He answered no questions, though a thousand were put to him by men who thought their service gave them the right to ask truculently. In Asia the men who do not care to presume on service rendered are few, and to be feared, though Asiatics generally fear the other kind. Before he had gone five miles the atmosphere of discontent and the growing murmur, of a kind that even Alexander the Great had been obliged to heed, forced itself on Dick, and made him show his strength again.

He did not try to ignore. Facts to him were stern things, to be handled savagely, as facts. He halted the column. True to his usual course, he cut straight at the heart of trouble and left its makers wondering what it had been and who had imagined it.

"Those who come with me must be satisfied with explanations when I give them!" he said simply. "But nobody need come! Fall out, those who wish to march the other way!"

Not a man fell out, so he rode along the line, repeating his words exactly to the following companies one by one. Faced with the blunt alternative of following or going free, there was not one who cared to lose Dick's leadership; the newcomers were eager to win glory, and the veterans—for so they were beginning to regard themselves—were jealous of the new arrivals as well as confident in Dick; like Alexander's men, they had wanted to dictate which way he ought to lead, but they had met a bigger man than Alexander.

"Forward!" Dick ordered, riding on again; and as every Eastern always does, each man in the sprawling line scanned his face eagerly. It was plain as daylight to them that he had forgotten the incident already; not only did he bear them no resentment or cumber his mind with memory of an incident that had no longer weight, but his mental habit was so fixed and definite that strangers could read it instantly. It was a habit that produced more respectful confidence than a thousand promises or even a thousand acts could ever have done; and his men tramped uphill behind him now, or sat their horses, with an air of going on their chosen way.

THERE was one thing left that worried Dick, and it was not of the sort that generally worries generals in the field. There was a woman with his force, of a sort that does not settle down as a rule to roughing it, a woman of the rather pampered, very imaginative, city-loving type, who was in love with Andry, and so far gone in love with him that convention and its claims sat lightly on her. A French lady's-maid, educated in intrigue, was not exactly likely to be useful; yet Andry loved the woman, and Dick loved Andry as one good man may love another, with a loyalty that passes mere expression or mere words. He owed it to Andry to preserve the maid's good name, yet he dared not, for the sake of human charity, send the maid back to be bullied, tortured, even perhaps killed by her erstwhile mistress.

"Where's your girl?" he demanded at the evening halt, when the watch-fires were beginning to leap brightly in the gloom, and the patient wounded lay waiting for supper and the rough attentions of rough men. Andry went off in search of her, and Dick turned to Usbeg Ali Khan who, with a meekness that was somewhat new to him, had ridden up for orders.

"Any women with the new arrivals?" Dick demanded.

"I will see, *bahadur*."

"You ought to have known!" said Dick, and almost for the first time Usbeg Ali accepted the reproof without answering; there was the making of a most amazingly good soldier in the Afghan, and Dick, more than any living man, knew how to uncover the gold that surely lay beneath the outer dross of brag and jealousy. Usbeg Ali rode through the gloom wondering at himself, but almost worshipful of Dick.

Andry brought Marie Mouquin, and stood her before Dick, but Dick did not

Digitized by Google

speak to her. He was sitting on a tree-root, staring into a fire, at which a Persian cooked skewered scraps of bird-meat for him. Soon, timidly and one by one, twenty women followed Usbeg Ali out of blackness and grouped themselves in a semicircle to Dick's right. They were veiled, and behind them in the shadows lurked their menkind, ever watchful.

"Bring the men into the firelight!" commanded Dick.

Unwillingly the men came forward, evidently suspicious, and as evidently thoughtful of the Cossack treatment of their womenkind.

"Are those your wives?" demanded Dick.

No Moslem likes to talk about his women, particularly to an "unbeliever," but they gave assent reluctantly.

"Why are they here?" asked Dick.

"At whose mercy would they be, had we left them behind?" blurted out a young man, whose fiery glances were for Dick and a young woman at the end alternately.

"At whose mercy would they be if I sent them away?" asked Dick. And no one answered.

"Let each man claim his woman!"

In the dancing firelight and hobgoblin shadows it was difficult to tell one woman from another or from the night, but within two seconds there was a man beside each of them, and their silence was proof that they were rightly paired.

"I know the Moslem law," Dick said then. "I have no quarrel with the law, nor any wish to break it. But——"

The men leaned forward, and particularly the younger man who had been the only one to answer Dick. The law of women and their veil is almost the greatest problem of the East.

"—This is an army, in a state of war; and there is only one use for women with an army!"

The men drew in their breath, and even the shadows seemed to listen in suspense. In the East, as everywhere, women with an army have been the undoing of more generals than one. The young man clutched his sword.

"They must serve the wounded."

There was a gasp of breath let out again.

"There is a woman here, a Feringee, who must know something of the art of aiding wounded. Marie Mouquin!"

THE maid stood forward, glancing around for Andry, yet too fascinated by Dick Anthony to look away from him for more than a fraction of a second at a time. Dick sat still, motionless except that he scribbled in the dust with the ferrule of his scabbard.

"This woman has no husband. She is a prisoner. I mean that her honor shall be strictly guarded. So I give her into the keeping of these twenty women, and them into her keeping. They are to obey her, as soldiers obey an officer, yet they are never to allow her out of sight or out of reach. She is to instruct them in the matter of the wounded, and any attempt—by any man—to molest a woman in any way at all is to be reported at once to me. I—will—deal—with the—man! Any woman who prefers it may go away—now—this minute—with her man. Those who wish to go, go!"

No one moved, and no one spoke. Unknowingly, and yet unerringly because he held the key to any problem under that red thatch of his, Dick had touched a secret spring whose flow will surely change the face of Asia. Of two courses there is always one more honest than the other; of ten courses one at least is always absolutely honest; with Dick it was a habit, fixed as the act of breathing, to seek instantly for that honest course and hold it. So, because honesty is the key-note of the universe, on which God built it, he was ever finding new resources, without actually seeking them, since the universe is infinite.

Not even the Persians realize how strong nor how determined is their women's movement, that has spread in spite of Russia, and of Moslem law, and of ignorance, through Persia from end to end. In its wake it has brought ambition, and a new dream of what a woman's life may mean and her tasks may be. Dick, over his campfire, tugged at the veil of custom-ridden ages, and showed a score of women an opening for the pent flood-water of their energy.

They knew no French. Marie Mouquin knew no Persian, or so little that they might be said to have no tongue in common. Yet, in a minute, since their new cause was in common, they had reached the beginning of an understanding, and they went away singing, clustered round Marie Mouquin and awake to the fact that, like their menfolk, they were active in the vanguard of a fight for freedom.

Digitized by Google

Not only the wounded were the gainers by it. The whole force was aware that the steel chains of convention had been snapped somewhere, somehow. Men, who would submit to torture rather than admit one article of Moslem custom out of date or void, stood by and stared through the torch-lit gloom at women of the better class bathing and bandaging wounded, unrelated men. There was no voice raised in protest. There was no attempt to interfere. There were even men, who would have cursed at the mere suggestion an hour before, who carried water now at the bidding of strange women, and where thrilled at the thought of doing good in new ways.

THERE was no trouble on the march next day, for the women walked beside the wounded, and no man thrust himself too near. Marie Mouquin made her reports to Dick direct, and he did not allow even Andry to have a word with her so long as she was answerable for and to the other women. There were no favors, no exceptions.

So a feeling grew up in the little army that was new to Asia, and a new confidence was born between these women and the men who marched ahead of them; and so it happened that when Dick reached his mountain aerie, out of sight and sound of the troubled plains, he was able to leave Marie Mouquin behind him and to ride on an errand of his own, confident that all would be well with her and the other women.

He formed his Persians up in hollow square, drilled and undrilled packed together in a dense, deep mass.

"Are we one in our fight for Persia?" he demanded.

"Aye!" was the answer.

"Have we any other cause that we put first?"

"Nay!"

"Wait here, then, and drill, while I ride to Teheran and back!"

There was murmuring at that, and a hundred voices were raised in angry protest.

"We could have marched on Teheran before! Are we slaves? Are we little children, to be treated so?"

"Silence!" thundered Dick, and before his voice had done reverberating from wall to wall of the vast amphitheater one might have heard a twig drop; even the breathing was subdued.

"In this place, on this spot, about a month ago, I pledged my word. I accepted your leadership. So, now, in the same spot, I offer you my resignation. Take it if you have any mercy, for I am weary of leading men who are not mine, in a cause that is not mine!"

The moonlight streamed on him, as it had done when they met him first, bathing him in silver and making his great claymore shimmer like a silver strip. There seemed to be a halo round him; and the agony of loneliness that had been eating at his soul these months long lent his face a look of sorrow that appealed to the poetry latent in every Persian heart.

"Nay!" came the answer, thousands strong. "Lead us! Lead us! We obey!"

"*Zindabad Dee-k-Anthonee shah!*" yelled Usbeg Ali from somewhere at hand behind him, and for the second time within five weeks that amphitheater echoed and reechoed to the crashing thunder of that shout. They left no doubt about their choice, nor of their confidence; and so that night he counted them into companies again, giving each new company a strong proportion of seasoned men. Between them, he and Usbeg Ali Khan picked out new officers, and at last, an hour or two before dawn, Dick gave his final directions about drill while he would be away.

As it had been when he first made use of that high amphitheater, it was to be almost ceaseless from dawn until dark; he even arranged for lectures after dark from a few of the officers, Afghans mostly, who had had experience in the art and theory of war. Two hours before dawn he lay down to sleep. At dawn he was up again, watching Andry girth two chargers, and giving final orders to Usbeg Ali Khan.

"Remember, Usbeg Ali, be resolute! Punish the first breach of discipline, then there won't be a second one to fear. Above all, keep them busy! Work them until they fall asleep!"

"Aye, *bahadur!* They shall surely sweat!"

The thousands were awake to watch Dick go, and his wish to slip off quietly was not gratified; the forest crashed to the thunder of their cheering as he rode through the gap at the lower end beside the watercourse, and it was minutes before Andry, riding along behind, could make his voice heard above the din. But at last Dick realized

Digitized by Google

that he was being spoken to, and turned his head.

"What is it?" he asked.

"I'm skeert o' leavin' Marie!"

"Why?"

Andry raised his eyebrows, and then grinned until his face became a sea of twisted wrinkles.

"For a body o' discernment ye can ask the most redeeculous questions of ony man I iver knew," said Andry. "Why? For she's a wumman, an' gude-lookin', an' belongs tae me—an' yon are black men—Perrrsians. I hae ma doots!"

"About her?"

"Na-na! O' the Perrrrrrsians. A black skin an' a black hearrrt gang aye taegither tae my way o' reckonin'!"

"Don't you trust her?"

"Aye!"

"Then, come on! Trot, March!" answered Dick, and he started downhill at a pace that jolted Andry so that his jaw shook and he had to keep from speaking lest he bite his tongue.

THEY rode all that day in silence, watering the horses at chance-met streams, and eating together under some huge tree but saying nothing. Andry knew better than to question Dick on matters that Dick chose to keep to himself, and he was too busy thinking of his girl to be very curious or very interested about their object or direction.

They slept, the first night out, many miles beyond the column's last camp on the homeward march, for two men traveling light can move, on foot or horseback, almost twice as fast as any army. They slept turn about, four hours at a stretch, with a saddle for a pillow, and they were off again before the first peep of dawn.

It did Andry good, for it shook him down on to his saddle, and he learned more horsemanship in that hard ride with Dick than he had picked up yet. To keep his mind from dwelling on the crisis and so losing proportion and the priceless ability to form swift judgments, Dick spent the long hours teaching him, riding close beside him instead of ahead, until the huge man began to lose his awkwardness and the horse he rode began to suffer less and less.

They skirted Astrabad by twilight, slept within ten miles of the city, and were off again at dawn on the road to Teheran before there was any risk of being seen; and later in the day they were mistaken over and over again for Russians, so that travelers coming toward them on the same road pulled out and rode wide or hid.

It was evident enough that Russia had lost her grip of late, although the countryside was not yet sure enough to dare be openly rebellious. At wayside villages where they stopped to ask for food they were met with scowls, and sometimes with refusals; it needed always a little hectoring on Dick's part, and sometimes a little show of force from Andry to procure a meal, even for payment. Once or twice stones were hurled at them as they rode out of villages, and more and more, with each mile of the journey, Dick realized that a spark would fire the ready magazine.

Less than a day out from Astrabad along the road to Teheran he knew he need only proclaim his identity to have an army at his back stronger, at least numerically, than that now drilling in the mountains. Yet, he held his tongue and hand.

It was a little after dawn on the second day after passing Astrabad that they were overtaken by two Afghans, with a note written in Persian from Usbeg Ali Khan. The men had ridden hard, for their horses dripped sweat and trembled at the knees. The note was short and to the point:

> Sahib bahadur, these are my two best personal followers, whose honor is my honor, and whose blood and breath are my blood and breath. It is not good to ride so far as to Teheran with but one man. Thou, I and Andry would have been enough. These two take my place, just as I take thy place here. Salaam. USBEG ALI KHAN.

Dick said nothing, although Andry looked relieved and welcomed the two Afghan officers in broad Scots that was as Greek to them. After a half-hour halt that gave the two weary horses a chance to recover wind but not time enough to stiffen, Dick led the way on again, and it was not until dawn of the next day, after a long sleep in the open and a careful examination of their mounts, that Dick made any use or took much notice of his uninvited escort.

"Do you know the way to Teheran?" he asked them as they mounted.

"Surely we do, *bahadur*. Beyond Teheran lies the road that leads to Kabul. We could find it, as a bat flies homeward, in the dark!"

"Ride on," said Dick. "Keep a mile

Digitized by Google

ahead of me, and one of you ride back to warn me of anything suspicious."

He could not have told, had anybody asked him, why he felt nervous; but nervousness was so foreign to him that he took it seriously. He knew himself in sound health, and he knew that more than once in his career an intuition he did not understand had proved quite accurate; he rode all that day anticipating trouble of some kind at every other stride, and ready for it. It was not until evening, when neither of his Afghans had seen fit to ride back and caution him, that he lost his sense of dread and rode once more with a care-free swing that reassured his horse and Andry.

At dusk he expected to overtake the Afghans and to find them getting supper or busy with their horses. Mile after mile he rode with his eyes on the track in front, and it was when the night shut down with no signs of his advance-guard that the uncomfortable feeling of foreboding came back, making him loose the sword in his scabbard and finger his pistols.

THE road was villainous, as all the roads in Persia are; there were ruts across it that could have hidden twenty men apiece in ambush, and great boulders strewn along the way from behind which a sniper could have picked his target leisurely; there were grades where the marks of handspikes showed how wheeled traffic had to be helped up, and landslides over which no human traffic could have passed at all; at each of the latter a side-track to the right or left had to be picked perilously through the dark until the road could be reached again beyond.

It was near a landslide that a voice said, "Ees eet peace, Jehu?" in an accent that was utterly un-English, and Dick knew himself betrayed. Instantly his mind flew back to the Rajput, who had brought a letter to him and to whom he had given a written answer. This voice, that spoke out of black darkness with greasy foreign accent, was not the Rajput's, but the words were those that Dick had given for a password.

For the fiftieth fraction of a second, while his courage and his self-command came back to him, suspicion flashed across his brain that the Rajput had sold him. But even before his hand had reached his pistol, or Andry's horse shot past him riderless, he remembered what his first impression of the Rajput had been; and he had learned to trust first impressions absolutely.

So, since that left his mind free to search afield, a second thought and action came simultaneously. As the hammer of an automatic clicked beneath the pressure of his thumb he knew who the enemy must be. He recalled that he had given the password aloud to the Rajput before consenting to write his answer, and that the Princess could not well have helped overhearing it.

"War!" he answered, following his pistol's click.

A rope whirled through the dark, and missed him because a bullet from his pistol drove through the thrower's skull. The flash showed him two men kneeling, aiming at him; a bullet whizzed past him; but two more pistol shots replied, and the flash of a third unnecessary shot showed him three men lying in the track. He thought they looked like Russians.

Then a voice he could have recognized among a thousand called to him from behind a rock.

"King Dick! Will monsieur the king confer on me the favor of a minute's conversation?"

"Andry! Where are you, man?" Dick shouted.

"Is *monsieur le roi* at last afraid? Fie, Dick Anthony! Afraid of me, of a woman, in the dark?"

"Andry!"

There was no answer from behind him. In front Dick could see the dark form of Andry's horse looming. From somewhere near the horse the woman's voice began again, sweet, silvery, mocking.

"There were two men to account for him! They may not show themselves or speak, since *monsieur le roi* appears to be able to drill a hole through the middle of a word. But two men pulled him from his horse and he should be strangled by this time. Now, *monsieur le roi*, if you will promise not to shoot I will show myself; we can speak better face to face, you and I."

Dick did not speak. Logic assured him that unless this ambuscade had all but failed—had there been many more men to try conclusions with him—there would have been more action now, and less talk. He judged that he had only the Princess in front of him to deal with, though he could not guess how many, or how few, might be be-

Digitized by Google

mind. He dismounted, since a horseman is usually at a disadvantage in the dark and against men on foot.

"Is that my signal to advance?" the Princess asked.

Dick did not say a word. He was wondering whether he would really shoot her, should she show herself and try new tricks with him. He stood behind his horse's shoulder on the far side from her, giving her as little target as he could and listening with live ears for so much as a twig-snap or a pebble-movement from his rear.

"I am coming now!" said the Princess; and then Dick knew that he would not shoot her, whatever of justice or of sane precaution there might have been in the act. The fundamental fact that he was man and she woman was too much for him.

SHE stepped out, making more noise than Dick judged necessary. She seemed nearer to him than her voice had sounded, and he thought he heard something click, either in her hand or close beside her. He got the impression that she was deliberately making noise enough to cover somebody else's movement, but his own shift of position to get better cover behind the horse's neck prevented him from hearing two slight footfalls, one on either hand. Suddenly she flashed an electric torch at him full in his eyes, and he was too dazed by the light to wonder even whence she had it. She held it absolutely steady, and straight at him.

"Lower it or I'll shoot!" he ordered; and since she knew for a certainty that he would keep his word, whatever he promised, she lowered it until it played on his horse's legs. He could judge then where her hand was, and he took very careful aim at her, wondering whether he could hit the torch and whether he dared try. He did not hear two stealthy footfalls drawing nearer, nor a third, not quite so stealthy, from behind.

Suddenly she switched the light out, and Dick strained his ears for sound of movement in her direction. But she laughed, and he judged by her voice that she stood still.

"*Monsieur le roi*, I want you to come with me. I want you in Russia—alive! I want you to explain how it was, and why I failed to make proper use of you. You have ruined me, my friend, but if you come with me to Russia I think you may be made to save the day for me yet! You are caught, my friend; you can not get away. You may shoot me if you wish, and I will thank you; but I do not think you will; and unless you shoot me you must come with me!"

She seemed to Dick to be speaking purposely so low that it was difficult to catch her meaning. He caught himself straining both ears to catch her words, and too late he realized that ears can be fooled as well as eyes. It was not until they were each within a yard of him and his horse shied at them that he heard two men; and then they were rushing at him with a rope and it was too late to move his pistol-arm or reach his sword.

A rope went round his neck and another snared his legs. The nooses tightened, and a man's full weight swung against each to throw him. He felt the blood surging to his temples and his knees begin to give.

He heard the Princess laugh that silvery, sweet, devilish laugh of hers that always went with triumph. He fought against the ropes, struggling with all his spun-steel might and will to burst them, until the night seemed a sea of crimson flame that whirled around his head and his ears were caves for all the winds of the world to whistle in.

Then, with no warning and no sound, two huge arms came from the depth of night behind him, like arms of an octopus. Each wound itself around a Russian's waist. The tension was relaxed on the ropes, and a second later the men who held them screamed, writhed, bent backward struggling, and were still.

Then a giant arose from the dark night, and seized one Russian with both hands. Speechless, he raised him, poised him, tried his weight, and hurled him with a grunt. The Russian seemed to hit nothing, but night swallowed him as if he had been a shadow.

Before Dick could get the blood out of his head and ears, the huge man stooped and seized the other rope-man. He whirled him by the legs, and sent him down the landslide after the first, with a second grunt that was like a grampus breathing.

"Awa' wi' ye!" said the voice of Andry. "Takin' me f'r a bigger fule 'an y'r ain sel's!"

A pistol-shot spat through the night, and the flash proved who had fired it; but she missed the horse and Dick.

"You throw a knife better!" Dick taunted

Digitized by Google

her. "Are you hurt, Andry?" he inquired.

"Na-na, but f'r a shakin' what wi' fa'in fra a horse, an' the strain o' killin' four men wi' ma fingers I'm feelin' fine!"

The Princess fired again, and missed again.

"I'd shoot yon Jezebel," said Andry. "Put a hole through her heid, Mr. Dicky."

But even before Dick could answer him her pistol came spinning through the night and took Andry on the shoulder. She followed it, leisurely enough and yet too quickly to be stopped by mere word of command. She was by Dick's horse before his order to stand where she was had left his lips.

"As you say, I'm better with a knife!" she smiled, and her hand went to her bosom. Her other hand was motionless behind her.

It was a sudden, unexpected move of Andry's that deprived her of the torch she held at her back. She had thought him behind Dick and the horse, but the giant could move as silently and swiftly as the shadows, and his fingers would have cracked her wrist unless she had let go. He flashed the torch full on her, and a clasp-knife shimmered in its rays as she aimed it at Dick's face. Andry spun her, and the knife went whirring through the dark.

"Kill me!" she said, laying a hand on Dick.

He stepped back, and her hand fell slackly to her side. In the torchlight she looked more ethereally lovely, more desirable, more frail and pitiable than Dick had ever seen her. She had found new clothes somewhere, perhaps in Astrabad, and she was dressed as if for a gala, except for hat; her hair hung over her ears in great loose coils, threatening to fall, and the torchlight made it glow like phosphorescent gold.

"Will you kill me, please?"

"Where are my Afghans—my advance-guard?" Dick asked.

"Dead!" she answered.

"Where?"

"Ahead here on the road. They would not surrender when they were ordered. Won't you kill me, please?"

"Of course not!" answered Dick.

"Dick! Rather than anything I would like to die in your two arms, with the breath crushed out of me! Won't you kill me, Dick? You have ruined me. Be merciful and kill me!"

Dick meant to turn aside and put the horse between her and him; but before he could move she had flung herself into his arms, and clung there sobbing. Dick tried to free himself, but her fingers clutched his shirt and her head was buried in his bosom.

It was Andry again, flashing the torch, who proved too canny for her. He stepped around behind her, and again his fingers seized her wrist; he wrenched a second knife from them and held it out for Dick to see.

"She's a pairfect leddy!" said the big man. "Wull ye gie me leave tae wring her neck?"

"No," said Dick. There was need of an answer, for Andry's fingers twitched.

"Dick, I have shot my last bolt! I surrender!" Both hands were hold of him again. "These Russians you have killed were the last men I could get to rally to me. Now there are no friends left anywhere—no servants—no money, influence—no anything! Take me, Dick! Take me on your own terms!"

"No," said Dick.

"What will you do to me?"

"Nothing. Why should I?"

"Will you leave me here?"

"Certainly! Get your horse, Andry."

"Dick, I'll kill myself if you leave me here!"

"Have you caught him? Mount, then—flash that torch—ride on slowly, straight ahead!"

Andry did as he was told, and Dick, swinging to the saddle, called back to the Princess standing in the middle of the track.

"We'll leave your torch burning on the grave of my Afghans, if we find them!" he said.

"Dick!" she called through the dark; but he did not answer her.

V

THE two Afghans were not dead, nor were their horses. The horses stood snorting over them, and with the aid of the torch Dick made out that one was merely stunned and the other bleeding fast from a bullet-wound close by his jugular. A little camp-fire surgery and cold water from a near-by stream were enough to make eventual recovery sure, so Dick took one man and Andry the other on the saddle in front of him, and with two led horses they resumed the march until they came to a village where food and shelter could be had.

They were more than half-way to Teheran

Digitized by Google

by this time. Persian police, with Russian orders what to do, patroled the roads and terrorized the villages more than bandits had done all down the warring centuries. The impression seemed to be that a bandit's word was sometimes good, but a policeman's never.

As usual, Dick and Andry were mistaken for Russians. Unquestioned, they were led through the gate of a mud-walled village; their horses were taken off and stabled; men stood around awkwardly, wondering what next to do.

"Shall we lock up the prisoners?" asked somebody in Persian; and then Dick understood.

"No," he answered, doing his best to imitate a Russian accent. "The prisoners are important. We must be alone with them."

The "third degree" is better understood in Persia since Russian rule began to usurp the northern provinces than ever it was in the less imaginative days of unpretending despotism. It was perfectly obvious to these village Persians that Dick was a Russian police officer, and Andry his subordinate, who chose to put prisoners to the torture under cover of the night and wring confessions from them before deciding what to do next. They were shown into a square hut with a heavy-timbered roof. Cords were brought them, a pot of hot charcoal, and an iron.

"Shall we bring the other prisoner?" asked the village headman, and Dick was taken so unawares that it was on his lips to ask "which other one?" But he contrived to nod naturally after a moment's pause that might be construed into serious deliberation.

"How long has the other been here?" he asked.

"A week. There was a reward for him. All the villages are warned to look out for all Afghans, as well as for Dee-k-Anthonee the Feringee. Alive or dead there is a great reward for either. This man swears he is no Afghan, neither Usbeg Ali Khan by name, nor yet knowing Usbeg Ali Khan; yet we believe otherwise. He came here at night with two horses, and demanded food. We seized him."

"Bring him!" commanded Dick.

"The reward? We get the reward?"

"You shall get your due," Dick answered grimly.

Five minutes later, cursing and growling threats, there was led in the Rajput *sowar* who should have presented Dick's letter at the Teheran Legation days ago. At sight of Dick his jaw dropped. Then—for a soldier's wit is a ready sense, and his was sharpened by desperation—he read the unexpressed command and the news of clear galloping ahead in Dick's eye and attitude. He said nothing, but dropped his head and waited.

"Leave us!" commanded Dick.

"He is dangerous!" said the headman. "He has hurt three men seriously. He springs suddenly, and tears at a man's throat with his fingers!"

For form's sake Dick drew his pistols and examined them before studying the knotted ropes that bound the Rajput's arms.

"Where are his weapons?" he demanded. "Bring them!"

The headman brought a saber and two pistols, and at a sign from Dick laid them in a corner of the room.

"His horses?"

"Are stabled near your excellency's," said the headman.

"Get them ready."

"They are worth a price. We captured them and him. We—I——"

Dick used an oath in Persian that is untranslatable but that he knew to be a favorite among Russian officers. He made a sudden move toward the headman; for in his part of Russian officer his fists had to be as ready, and as unfair, as his speech. The headman stammered, and ran for the door.

"Have those horses ready in ten minutes!" ordered Dick. "Get food for us and something for these prisoners. Bring it with the horses, and wait outside until I'm ready!"

He picked up the cord and pushed the iron into the red-hot charcoal. The headman was satisfied. Surely, truly, indisputably, here was Russian rule being asserted, and he shivered for his own skin as he slammed the door and ran to do Dick's bidding.

Then, in the light of a smoking, stinking, dim grease lamp, Dick and the Rajput eyed each other until Dick laughed.

"You'd better scream," said Dick in English. "Scream like a man in pain."

A tortured horse, faced with the fear of death, can scream more evilly than any other living thing except that Rajput. He let out a yell that curdled Dick's and Andry's blood—an ululating howl of agony that rose into a screech and died down at

Digitized by Google

last in a sob that would have drawn compassion from a deep-sea shark.

"Will that do?" he asked almost casually.

"Do it again," said Dick.

Andry helped out matters by beating the floor with a cord and dancing. Any one who listened from the outside and did not believe a man was being tortured would have disbelieved in the ability of fire to burn or of cords to cut and twist.

"Such torture must be very exhausting," Dick suggested, and the Rajput threw himself to the floor with another screech that sounded like a ghoul's death agony.

Then Dick strode to the door and opened it.

"Horses there?" he asked.

The horses stood in a row, six all told.

"Food ready?"

The headman brought it—meat, and native bread, with curdled milk. Dick put the food into his saddle-bag, took in the curdled milk for his wounded men and the Rajput, and then ordered Andry to carry the Rajput out. The Afghans had recovered consciousness, and could stagger out, but Andry lifted the *sowar*, and Dick strapped him over a saddle like a sack of oats.

"Slowly, sahib, ride slowly!" the Rajput whispered. "Slowly, lest I jerk myself in two!"

Dick ordered the two Afghans on one horse, and Andry tied their wrists together and their legs under the horse's belly.

"The reward, excellency?" said the headman as Dick mounted. "The reward was promised by the government!"

"This man denies his identity," said Dick, "but I will see about it. I will return along this road. Look out for me. When I come again you shall have what is due you."

The headman bowed low, and Dick led his "prisoners" out through the gate in one-horse file, brought up by Andry. He rode at a walk, for fear of the Rajput's muscles and his stomach laid on a high-built saddle, and he did not stop until the village ceased to be a shadow in the gloom or even a black ridge on a black horizon.

But when the bark of a village pariah had died down in the distance he drew rein. Then Andry drew his knife and cut the lashings in a hurry. Then the Rajput laughed again at last, and Dick handed him a full half of the bread and meat.

"No time to talk!" said Dick. "Eat as you go, and go like the night wind! Have you your letter yet?"

"Aye! They could not find it—may Allah's vengeance spoil their sleep and rot the substance of their children's children!"

"Ride on, then, and deliver it. Tell 'em I'm on the way. Tell 'em to meet me outside Teheran."

"At the tomb of Shamran Mirza, sahib."

"Where is that?"

"On the road—in view of the road. A man will ride out and give the challenge agreed on."

"Good," said Dick. "Good-by. Good luck to you!"

"And you, *bahadur!* May God give you understanding and a strong right arm! I have another service, or I would throw my weight into the scale. If we should prove to be on opposite sides, *bahadur*——"

"Then we'll each do our best!" laughed Dick. "Good-by!"

The Rajput saluted him and wheeled his horse. Then, without so much as one glance back across his shoulder, the *sowar* settled down to ride, and the hoofs of his cantering horse did a drum-beat that died out of recognition in the distance.

"We can take it easy now," said Dick, walking his horse closer to the Afghans and examining them again by the light of the torch he had thought to leave above their grave. They were recovering fast, with the elasticity that comes of hard, clean living. Dick ordered them on a horse apiece, one beside Andry and one by himself. The fifth horse, that the Rajput had left behind, Dick turned into a pack-horse, loading him with all the saddle-bags to relieve the others. So, with a loose horse jogging along between them, Dick first and Andry last, they started off again in no hurry at all, but each with an arm wound round an Afghan to support him in the saddle and each gnawing at the native bread and meat provided by the village headman.

THEY were too near Teheran now to ride too openly, and Dick, mistrusting Russian promises of any kind but particularly promises made at second-hand, chose to lie up all day and move by night. The British Legation might be acting in good faith, and very likely was, in promising him a free road to Teheran; but he did not choose to enter Teheran just yet on the strength of anybody's promise, nor to believe Russia committed until he saw with his own eyes the force that could com-

Digitized by Google

pel her ministers to keep their written or their spoken word. Diplomatists affect sometimes to believe the Russian Government; but Dick was not a diplomatist, nor anything except a gentleman of some acute experience, of the world in general but of Russia in particular.

The Afghan who had been no more than stunned suffered now only from a sore head, and Dick sent him at intervals to spy out the road from the nearest eminence, so that when they started off at dusk each evening they generally knew the nature of the trail and its direction, as well as what sort of travelers they were likely to overtake. They had to take a chance on who would meet them coming from the opposite direction, and Dick rode perfectly prepared to fight any Russian he might meet at the least dropped hint of a lame excuse.

But as it happened they rode unquestioned. There was something brewing, of which all the countryside was conscious, and yet of which no man dared to speak. There was a mystery that underlay the speech and movements of the peasantry, and a constant unexplainable swift drain of individuals from north and west to south and east. There were men who rode like Dick and Andry in the dark, giving no more excuse. There were men who stopped at each village to ask a multitude of questions and write down the answers to them—questions about corn and cows and sheep, water, and men. There were other men who rode in a hurry, and seemed to know everything already, or else not to care for anything but speed.

Almost nobody came back along the road from Teheran, and those who did were evidently merchants, or else peasant proprietors on their way back from selling cattle. Those whom Dick questioned reported a strong demand for all they had to sell, at almost famine prices.

"Any news of war?" asked Dick, fifty times if once.

"War? What war?" they answered; and they would pass on laughing at him, as if he were a demented man or else a man with a weird sense of humor.

The challenge, when it came at last, proved unexpected. A man rode down through the gathering gloom, spurring as though at a tent-peg.

"Is it peace, Jehu?" he laughed.

"Peace!" said Dick, and the man reined in. Though the light was dim Dick recognized an Englishman—English seat in the saddle, English clothes, English reins bunched up in an English riding-glove, and a saddle made in London just as surely as the horse was bred in Turkestan.

"Are these all you brought with you?" the man asked, eying Andry and the two Afghans, one of whom still had to cling to the saddle with his hand.

"Yes," said Dick.

"Can you identify yourself?"

"As whom?" asked Dick, and the man laughed again.

"Well—identify yourself!" he answered.

"I have a letter addressed to me from the British Legation at Teheran."

"Signed by whom?"

"H. J. Ommoney."

"Show it."

Dick drew out the letter and held it up in the waning light. He knew, without knowing why he knew, that the man would snatch at it, so both horses answered to a spur-touch at the same instant and both sprang together in the same direction.

"What frightened 'em, I wonder?" said the man.

"Couldn't say," smiled Dick.

"I'm H. J. Ommoney."

"I'm Richard Anthony of Arran."

"Ride this way."

Without another word he wheeled and led the way up a side-path to a tomb, domed and dignified even in its ruin, that stood like a watch-tower overlooking the road from a height some half a mile away. As he followed him Dick folded up the letter very small and, checking his horse for a second, passed it back to Andry. Andry stuffed it down his boot, not knowing what it was and not caring in the least, but understanding fully that he was to hide it.

The ruined entrance to the tomb yawned dark and wide in front of them and the man who had said he was Ommoney dismounted. Dick followed suit.

"I'll talk to you alone," said Ommoney.

"I'll bring one man," said Dick.

"No!" said Ommoney.

"Yes!" said Dick.

Ommoney's eyes met Dick's and followed their line. Dick was looking at a Waler mare, that bore an Indian military saddle on her back. Ommoney swore beneath his breath, and Dick knew by that, as certainly as he knew the contents of his pocket, that

Digitized by Google

the Rajput *sowar* was inside the tomb.

"He hid the horse all right," said Dick, "but didn't tether him tight enough!"

Ommoney said nothing, but led the way in, and Andry followed Dick, looming above him like an exaggerated shadow. At the same second Dick and Andry both caught sight of the *sowar's* eyes, so his voice that boomed "*Salaam, bahadur!*" was not a surprise.

"Glad to meet you again," said Dick, turning to face Ommoney who leaned with his back against the rifled brickwork of the tomb proper that rose from the center of the building.

"You may name your own price for that letter," said Ommoney with both hands in his pockets. "We want it back."

"We? You mean yourself or the Legation?"

"The Legation. We. You'll understand that it was a most unusual letter for a Legation to write to any man. We admit that. Name your own price."

"Recognition!"

"How d'ye mean? Recognition as whom or what?"

"Official recognition as Dick Anthony of Arran!"

Ommoney shook his head.

"We couldn't do it. Man, you don't seem to grasp the facts! When we first heard of you and of your claim to be Dick Anthony of Arran, we cabled home to ask about you. The home Government replied at once in detail, giving dates and all that kind of thing, that Richard Anthony of Arran had been drowned at sea, from a ship called, I think, the *Themistokles*—had been picked up and identified by a passing Russian ship—and was buried at sea. Papers found on the dead body were sent back to England by the Russian Government. There was no doubt about the case at all. Your claim won't hold water for a second, Mr.—ah—Anthony."

"The British Government got all that information from the Russians," answered Dick.

"Certainly."

"Every word of it was a lie!"

"But they sent proof."

"Piffle!" answered Dick. "The Russian Government is engaged on a campaign for snaffling northern Persia. To that end I was kidnapped and, being a likely looking fighting-man, was driven into hiding in the mountains, to be egged and nagged into committing acts of brigandage that would give excuse enough for Russian occupation of the country with an army corps. Those are the facts. Russia is hoodwinking England all along the line."

"Nothing of the sort!" said Ommoney. "Russia and Great Britain are allies in a European war! And that brings us to the point at issue. I'll revert to the letter later when I've told you more of the facts. I'm going to appeal to you as an Englishman to give that letter back—or to sell it—just as we're appealing to you to leave Persia, for patriotic reasons."

"I've named my terms for the surrender of the letter," answered Dick.

"I wouldn't dare the British Government if I were you!" said Ommoney.

Dick tapped his breeches pocket, as if to infer that the letter was in it and would stay there, but said nothing. A moment later he sat down on a pile of bricks with his back to the dark and his face toward Ommoney, who sat on a fallen piece of stone. The Rajput *sowar* lit a candle, sheltering it between his hands, and set it cautiously in a niche where it could not be blown out by stray gusts. Its light seemed to make the shadows move, and outlined Dick's face and Ommoney's, but the rest of the darkness seemed only darker by the contrast.

"THIS war has been sudden," said Ommoney; "amazingly sudden! Fourteen days ago we hadn't an idea that there was even a chance of war. At least we in Teheran hadn't. Then news of it came in over the wire, and lots of definite instructions. It came like a thunderbolt! It seems like a general show-down. All Europe and half Asia has been called upon to show its hand. England, France and Russia came out strong for each other; Germany and Austria stood together. So far, Italy stands out. Servia started it——"

"And that means Russia!" interjected Dick.

Ommoney took no notice of the interruption; he was too intent on marshaling what he believed to be the facts, or else too sure of his case.

"Germany struck first, being able to mobilize most quickly. Germany has rushed at the throat of France, to try and strangle

Digitized by Google

her before Russia can begin. Belgian neutrality has been violated, and that dragged England in. The point is now to hold back Germany all along the line until Russia can invade Germany from behind in force enough to really help. To do that Russia needs every man-Jack of her standing army to hurry to the front while the reserves are being called up. It seems that one of the largest Russian camps lies to the north of here——"

"It certainly does!" said Dick. "I've plans of it, and details of its intended line of march!"

"Where did you get it?"

"I got it," said Dick, "and that's enough."

"Well, Russia wants to march those troops away, but daren't as long as you're at large in the Elburz Mountains."

"I'm sure of that!" said Dick. "Russia wants to march 'em south, not north—into Persia, not away from it! Without bragging, I'm entitled to say that I've started a considerable opposition in these parts."

"You are invited by our Government to leave Persia, give up your personal ambitions, and go free, so that Russia may be free to use every available man——"

"With whom to take advantage of Great Britain!" answered Dick. "No. Certainly not!"

They eyed each other in silence for a minute then, for they seemed to have reached an ultimatum. One or the other would have to yield before progress could be made. Dick felt what he judged to be a snake, that crept behind him gently, just touching him. Ommoney's eyes were fixed on Dick's, or Dick would have suspected something else, but those eyes seemed steady and intent; they saw nothing beyond Dick's. So, since the safest thing to do with a snake is to let it crawl its course and not to frighten it, Dick sat absolutely still.

It was the snake's attempt to get into his pocket that enlightened Dick. He moved a little, to make the job easier. The quick movement covered a sideways glance at Andry, and was enough to show that the big man saw what was going on. A flash of mutual understanding passed between them before Dick resumed his steady gaze.

The snake was a human hand that sneaked into his pocket and searched deep, but found it empty. It searched deeper still, while Dick marveled at the breathlessness and silence of its owner. Then Dick moved his leg in such a way, and so suddenly, that the arm was gripped by the stout cloth. At the same second Andry pounced. A man screamed. Andry dragged a nearly naked Persian out into the candle-light, with his wrist held now in Dick's iron fingers and his hand still deep in the pocket. Dick turned about, so that the man could be dragged into the middle.

"Wrong pocket, though," said Dick. "Friend of yours, by any chance?"

"Never saw him in my life," said Ommoney.

"Well," said Dick, "for a legate of the British Government, you lie handsomely. I should judge you are in practise. I've come a long way to see you, on the strength of a written promise that I hold, and I'm not going back until I've made an offer to the British Minister and have had his answer. You may take my message if you like. If you prefer it, though, I'll find another messenger."

"Better let that man go," said Ommoney, nodding at the wretched Persian who trembled in Dick's grip. With a smile of contempt Dick loosed him, and the man ran through the ragged opening out into the night.

"D'you want to hear what I've got to say?" asked Dick, and, whatever the rest of Ommoney's plan had been, he realized from the tone in Dick's voice and his attitude that he must play Dick's game or not at all. There were times when Dick could be too good-natured or too indifferent to care what friend or enemy might do; with women he could always stretch quixotism to the most exaggerated limit; but there were other times when his antagonist could not help but recognize steel resolution and indifference to all side issues.

"I'll listen," said Ommoney, for even the third assistant secretary of Legation, appointed for family reasons, may have some perspicuity.

"If this story of a war is true," said Dick, "it is I who hold trumps. I'll play them. I have an army of four thousand men, and it is growing. I even have some guns. Considering that Persian sentiment is with me, I have enough men to keep the peace of northern Persia. You may tell the Russian Minister at Teheran, through the British Minister, that he may withdraw every Russian soldier from Persia and from the fron-

Digitized by Google

tier, and I will guarantee both England and him that Persia will give nobody any trouble!"

Ommoney laughed.

"You mean you want opportunity to get your claws in tight, eh? Brigandage would be a profitable business without Russia to interfere!"

Dick moved restlessly, and Andry clucked as he always did when impatience burned his marrow-bones.

"I'm giving you a message for the British Minister," said Dick, "not arguing. I'm no bandit. I'm Richard Anthony of Arran, that's to say of better family and better right to be heard than you, or any other man who doesn't know how to play on-side. The Russian Government, through its spy, tricked me and drove me into Persia; and since the British Government saw fit to believe the Russians and to disbelieve me, I considered myself free to pledge my word to the Persians who are in the field for Persian independence. Persia is no part of Russia, nor ever will be if we can prevent it. Now, here is the point at issue."

The *sowar* stepped to the crumbling doorway, as if he heard or else expected somebody; Andry was after him like a flash, thrusting him aside and staring through the darkness in every direction with sailor's eyes that could see things which even the Rajput would have missed. But it was only the Rajput's horse, that nibbled grass around the building.

"It's a' richt, Mr. Dicky," said Andry, coming back. "Oor twa Afghans are on the look-out, hidin' in the shadows. Speak y'r mind i' full."

"As I have said several times, and as I can eventually prove, I am Dick Anthony of Arran, heir to the Anthony estates near Lamlash, and I have done nothing of which any Englishman need be ashamed. If the British Government cares to recognize me, and my position as leader of the Persian patriotic party, I will reciprocate to the limit of my power. To prove myself disinterested, I am prepared to guarantee to leave Persia whenever a properly elected Persian Government sees fit to notify the world at large that Persian independence is established. If England recognizes me, I dare come at once to Teheran and take service under the Persian Government. When this European war is over, I dare guarantee that Persia will be strong enough to resist encroachments without my aid. Meanwhile, I am in the field against Russia and for Persia. I *know* what Russia's intentions are, and I mean to thwart them. Recognize me and my claim, notify Russia she may draw off all her troops, and all's well. Refuse to recognize me, let Russia play her game, and I'll play mine, and Persia's! Also, the minute I get the chance I'll appeal to the world at large!"

"The world at large is much too busy with the European war to bother about you, Mr.—ah—Anthony."

Ommoney smiled savagely. He had expected to be able to hector and domineer it over a suppliant for peace.

"The world at large can be made to listen!" answered Dick. "However, you have got my message."

"There would be no sense in my riding back to Teheran with nonsense of that sort. The terms offered you are a free passage to the sea and transportation anywhere, provided you give back that letter."

"I refuse the terms," said Dick.

"Understand," said Ommoney, "if you refuse, the British as well as the Russian Government will be against you. We shall help Russia in every way we can."

"Are you going to take my message?" asked Dick.

"No," said Ommoney. "My instructions were to accept your surrender, to bring you in to Teheran, to smuggle you out again, to provide you with some money in case you happen to need it, and to see you safely on board ship from some point on the coast."

"Then I'll have to find a messenger," said Dick.

"Will you wait here, if I take your message in?" asked Ommoney.

"Certainly not. I've done more than my share. I have ridden for days to meet you on the understanding that you would have full power to treat with me. Now, whoever wants to strike a bargain with me will have to come and find me."

Their eyes glowed through the dark, and the flickering candle-light showed each man strained in an attitude of guardedness that verged on sheer distrust. They rose, both at the same instant, and the *sowar*, seeming to think the interview was over, stepped outside, followed by Andry. Outside, the *sowar* searched for the two Afghans, found them, and talked to them in a language Andry did not understand.

Digitized by Google

"On second thought," said Dick, "I'll send no other messenger. You are bound to report what I have said, and if you lie about it the British Government must take the consequences. The Minister should send a gentleman."

"What d'ye mean?" demanded Ommoney.

"You heard me rightly," answered Dick.

NOW it is a strange peculiarity of war that it makes men mad. The greater the war, the worse and less logical the madness. In time of peace Ommoney was a man who paid his card debts conscientiously, and whose word of honor carried as far, and justly so, as that of any other gentleman in the service of his king. But, like every other Englishman outside the immediate sphere of action, Ommoney had been deeply affected by the news of war—stirred to the lees of his weak being by it—yet had no responsibility thrust on him that would serve to keep his selfish little mind from looking inward. Then, unexpectedly, had come this order to ride out and interview Dick Anthony, and to Ommoney it had looked like an opportunity to serve his country.

He meant to take advantage of it. And, to men of the mental weight of Ommoney and others like him, to serve one's country is to serve one's self. Because he thought he would be gainer by bringing back Dick Anthony to Teheran, he thought he would be loser should Dick Anthony refuse to come with him. Therefore—so urged the minor music of a minor mind—he would lose still more, in his own esteem and the Legation's, should Dick Anthony ride back by the way he had come to his inaccessible hills. And, if he, Ommoney, would lose, England would lose. And he wanted to serve England.

Then there came to his mind an age-old, poisonous, abominable adage, that says "all is fair in love and war." Like all lies, it is a two-edged blade without a hilt, that cuts deepest the hand that uses it. To the mind that entertains that adage for a second, equivocation looks like truth, and trickery looks like honor.

Yet some relic of the rule they taught him at his public school still lingered in his mind, and Ommoney could not resist the promptings of the code that calls for warning of one's adversary. As certain Powers have done, he issued an ultimatum for the sake of form after he was ready, and too late to give his enemy a chance to arm.

"Of course," he said, "you understand the safe-conduct expires at once. If you come with me, you ride on my responsibility and I'll protect you. But I have no authority to guarantee you a safe road back again!"

Dick laughed. He was big enough and clear-eyed enough to see through Ommoney in the dark and understand the meanness of him. He was sorry for him, rather than contemptuous.

"This side of Teheran is mine, son," he said quietly. "But I'll be generous. If you hurry, you may have safe-conduct back. If I catch you outside Teheran again, I'll give you a lesson in deportment, though, that you won't forget! Remember what they used to do at school to boys who couldn't play on-side? Hurry! Catch your horse, and go! Lie about my message if you dare!"

Ommoney fingered at a pistol, and looked into Dick's strange eyes. He knew that the eyes were laughing at him. He knew that Dick's hands were both behind his back; and he was thinking that just at that moment there were no witnesses. A dead Dick Anthony would have seemed to Ommoney to be a blow struck hard for England. Yet he dared not draw, although he knew he had Dick at his mercy.

"You understand, your safe-conduct ceases from the minute you leave me?" he said, trying with one and the same thought to justify himself and yet excuse himself. He told himself he ought to shoot and was not afraid to shoot, yet that perhaps the letter of the code might call for a start to be allowed Dick on the way home.

"I understand," said Dick, "that the British Government disowns me, and has sent a pup to tell me so. If a dog had barked at me, I might have felt less mean, but to be warned off by a puppy is disheartening. However, I accept the fact that I'm disowned, and I'm going to take full advantage of it. Get out of here! Get out ahead of me! Get out before I kick you out!"

The voice had changed. What had been a rather weary, half-humorous, half-plaintive, wholly pleasing tone became at once the cracking of terrific whips that brought fear in their wake and understanding of the strength that they expressed. Never had Ommoney heard such might expressed in a

Digitized by Google

human voice, nor felt such terror as propelled him out into the night.

He ran, forgetting dignity, pistols, everything except the one ambition to get out of Dick's long reach and away to where his knees would leave off trembling. He found his horse, but could not mount it for a maddening minute, for the animal could sense his terror and would not stand still.

At last he forced the horse backward against the wall of the tomb, sprang into the saddle, and was off full-pelt. The last Dick saw of him was a retreating shadow, followed at full gallop by a Rajput *sowar*, and all the dignity, all the self-respect, all the majesty of British rule was worn by the dark-skinned gentleman who rode behind. The cad in front knew himself a disgrace to any empire—knew, too, that vengeance would taste sweet, and might be had.

"What did the *sowar* say?" asked Dick, walking out to the Afghans and signing to Andry to bring the horses. When one real man meets another each knows by instinct what the other one will do, and Dick did not even stop to wonder whether the Rajput had left any warning. He knew he had. He knew that Rajput for a gentleman.

"He bade us ride cautiously. He said the sahib is a *soorke butcha*, born in pigmire, thinking like a pig. He said there are Russians in the road between Teheran and here. He said the *soor-sahib* will almost surely warn the Russians. He said there is no other sahib such a *soor* between here and Feringistan, unless he be a Russian, for all Russians are *soorke butchas*, being so designed by Allah in His wisdom Who wished the faithful to have flesh and blood on which to try their sabers. So said the *sowar*, sahib."

"Oh," said Dick. "Ready Andry? Ready all? Mount! Walk, march! Right wheel!"

VI

THE *sowar* was exactly right in his prediction, though the consequences were other than either he or the "*soor-sahib*" or the British Legation could guess (not that the British Legation had anything to do with Ommoney's treachery). Ommoney did meet with Russians. They chanced to be political officers, one of whom he personally knew. They exchanged information — war news from the Russian, since the wires all led from Russia and the Russians had first gleaning; local news from Ommoney.

"Dick Anthony, the man they call 'King Dick,' is down the road. Can't be more than ten or fifteen miles away."

"How do you know?" asked the Russian, and Ommoney told him.

"I've no reason to keep silence," he explained. "We made the man an offer, and he refused it. It's no secret that we'll do all in our power to help you round him up."

"So," said the Russian, cursing softly to himself because the nearest telegraph operator was in Teheran and he had no instrument with him for tapping wires. "Did he hurry away, or might one overhaul him?"

"Couldn't say, I'm sure," said Ommoney.

So the Russian, who had three others with him, sent two men galloping back to Teheran to notify Russia, and Astrabad, and every other point that could be reached by telegraph. He himself, with the fourth man and the two best horses, plunged forward into the night in the hope of catching Dick, and a long stern chase began that could end only one way unless the Russians met with accident.

For Dick was in no hurry. He had claimed all Persia "this side of Teheran" as his, and he meant to prove it. He threw off all pretense of secrecy and proclaimed himself wherever there were men to listen.

"I am Deek Anthonee," he told them. "This is my sword of which you have heard." And he showed the great two-edged claymore with the beryl set in its basket-hilt.

As once before he had come out of the dawn on Persia and had dazed her by his unexpectedness, so now he rode out of the night with a giant on a horse behind him and was accepted without question. He seemed supernatural. His claim, that he had come to deliver Persia from her enemies, was too timely and too altruistic to be disbelieved.

The East is the home of visionaries, where the matter-of-fact is fiction and the things men dream about are true. This man with a voice like shaken brass, with bare red head, with eyes whose color none could recognize, who rode and spoke with such authority, fitted too well into the fabulous imaginative tales that they had heard about Dee - k - Anthonee to be disbelieved. He

Digitized by Google

seemed too good to be otherwise than true, and they flocked to him, flocked after him, and blocked his road waiting for him.

The two Russians overtook him at a village where he sat with a thousand at his feet and told them what he expected of them if they hoped to be his men. For Dick was Persia's now, and Persia his; who was for him was his brother, and who against him would be likely, like Russia, soon to feel the weight of his attack.

"I will ride on, but I will come back with an army," he assured them. "Only a few may travel with me now—a few from each village and no more. Let the rest hold the roads and villages and wait for me. No harbor and no peace for any Russian! Refuse them food! Refuse them information! Drive them over their own border, and be ready to rise behind me when I come!"

The two Russian political officers were dragged down from their horses and stood in front of Dick for sentence, and Dick laughed aloud when the senior of them told his rank in the expectation of immediate respect from Dick.

"I rode with an offer for you," said the Russian.

"Tell me about it," answered Dick, with a dry smile that in some way seemed to take the starch out of the Russian's bluster.

The Russian spoke in English, so that only Dick and Andry understood him, and Andry's face, all wrinkled into gargoyle patterns while he listened, was enough to assure the villagers that no tide was being turned by the Russian argument. Disgust is an expression that the Scots are masters of, and Andry did not bridle his emotion.

"We know about the offer made you by the British Legation. It was made after a consultation with us."

"It sounded that way!" answered Dick.

"We were sure you would never accept it. We were ready with our alternative. I rode out to meet the man who brought you the offer, and hurried after you the minute he let me know that I was free to offer mine."

Dick heard him out in silence, disbelieving nearly every word he said and grimly resolved to believe no promises. All he was positive about was that this man and Ommoney had met.

"It is useless to deny your hold on these two Northern Provinces. We admit—Russia admits—that you have done wonders and that your grip is firm. You are a man to be reckoned with. But you must admit that the full strength of Russia is too great for you. Eventually—perhaps sooner than you think, perhaps not so soon as we think—the weight of Russia would crush you out of existence. Do you see the point?"

"I'm listening," said Dick.

"Well, we'll bargain with you. England has disowned you. Become a Russian! Take a Russian wife! As a Russian we will let you do in Persia what we dare not let you do otherwise! Think!"

"I have thought," answered Dick. He was looking hard at the other Russian, studying him, and seeming to have lost all interest in the spokesman or what he said.

"You're about my weight and height," said Dick addressing the second man, and the man did not answer since he did not know what Dick meant.

The first man understood by now that he might as well argue with a mountain as try to tempt Dick farther. It was clear that Dick intended to rejoin his army, and, after that, Russia's chance of a peaceful entry into Persia would be nil.

"Will you wait here," he asked Dick, "while I send a messenger to our Legation to bring you back an offer in writing?"

"No," said Dick. "But you may go back. You, not the other man—I need him. Yes, I'll send some Persians with you to see you're not molested on the way. Tell your Legation from me that there isn't room for a single Russian south of the Atrak River. Tell 'em I'm not English, for England has disowned me. I'm Persian, and Persia's fight for freedom has begun!"

Spluttering and fulminating, the Russian was sent back to Teheran with a Persian guard that in itself spelled ignominy. For a Russian to need protection at the hands of Persian peasants was a reversal of the usual condition that roused his Russian gorge and would have made him shed tears had he not been too angry.

Spluttering even more, his erstwhile companion was led off between two files of an ever-swelling horde of Persian irregulars who rode with Dick. The man could not guess what Dick's intentions were, and none of the escort, nor even Andry, could enlighten him, for when Dick had a plan laid out ahead he liked to keep it to himself and get its details all perfected in his own head before entrusting it to others.

Digitized by Google

HE RODE no more at night now. Since he had declared himself his progress was a march of triumph. At the village where he had found the *sowar*, the headman beat his forehead in the dust, and Dick gave him his promised dues in the form of a levy of food, men and horses. That village had to provide a pack-train for the host, with the headman in person to lead it.

It was from then on that Dick kept hearing tidings of a force that waited for him near Astrabad, to cut him off from his army in the hills. The wires had worked, and word had gone from Teheran. There were enough men in Astrabad to rid the earth of an undrilled mob such as rode with Dick, and Dick knew it well.

He sent ahead man after man to let himself be captured and to boast of Dick's intentions. He boasted he would take Astrabad on his way to the hills, and give it to his host to plunder, and before long he learned that the Russians had made an ambush ready for him. Then, for the first time, he really began to show his hand. He whispered to his Afghans as he rode, and after a while they whispered in turn to some of the Persians whom they judged worth confidence.

Nobody seemed to know who put the notion into the head of the village headman whom Dick had made provide a pack-train, but at night he started a campaign of treason, and made amazingly swift headway. It was astonishing how swiftly, even for Persia, the feeling for Dick gave way to a distrust of him, and how soon the thought followed after that of the advisability of making peace with Russia in the surest, swiftest way.

It was only two hours after dusk the next night when a man rode out of the camp and raced like the night wind for Astrabad, where the Russian outposts rounded him up. He assured them that all Dick's men would bolt incontinently on the next night, when he camped in sight of the city; the Russians might come and pounce on him, and would be certain to surprise him if they crept up quietly.

A bargain was struck. The Cossacks were not to shoot, and every living Persian should go free and be forgiven. Dick was to be handed over, or rather left for the Russians to ride down on and do with as they pleased.

So, to make things doubly sure, the Russians drew their men across a line ten miles long, that extended left and right between Dick and the hills. They sent scouts to report his coming, and it was not until he was within an hour's ride of the place where he would camp that they let the line draw in and form a semicircle to enclose him.

Night came, and Dick's Russian prisoner slept. Pretending they did not trust him, they had set him on a hillock and he nodded in the moonlight with his chin resting on his knees. Midnight came, and he awoke to find himself alone. His guard was gone. The native tents were struck. There was a feeling and a taste in his mouth suggesting opium. He stood up to stretch himself and recollect. In the dark he looked astonishingly like Dick Anthony.

There was a sudden shout—a sudden order to surrender, and a rush! A log was thrown at him; its middle took him in the chest and pinned him down.

Ten men pounced on him, and hurried fingers searched him for weapons. His wrists were tied. Then he was set on his feet and dragged to a man who waited on horseback at the bottom of the rise.

"So-ho, Dick Anthony!" said the man on the horse.

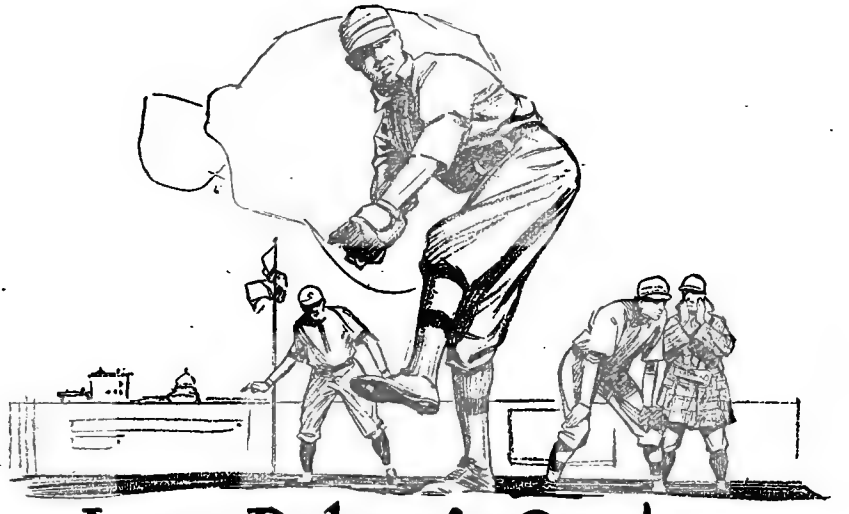
"My name is Donojouski!" said the prisoner.

Away in the distance, racing in a wide-flung arc for the foot-hills of the Elburz range, rode first two Afghans, one of whom was none too certain of his seat in the saddle. Behind them rode Andry Macdougal, on a horse that groaned beneath his weight. And last rode Dick, widest awake of all of them. He rode last to make certain that he was not followed, either by Russians or by Persians; for he rode to bring his army, and he had charged the Persians to keep open for him the road that led to Teheran.

The dam was down at last. Dick Anthony was free! Disowned by England, scornful of Russia, free to fight for whom he would and for what he would. And the cause he chose was Persia's!

The next adventure of *Dick Anthony of Arran* will appear complete in the next issue.

Digitized by Google



Jerry Rohan's Goat

by Octavus Roy Cohen

JERRY ROHAN'S goat had gone. There had been nothing premeditated about it; a batting bee in the ninth inning after the Marines had sewed up the game and stowed it in their back pockets—and then a rush, a scamper—and the goat had flashed away in full view of everybody.

Of course there wasn't any real, honest-to-goodness four-legged goat; it was the figurative goat of sporting vernacular, but it had gone nevertheless, and there was weeping and wailing and extreme gnashing of teeth in the camp of the downtrodden Marines.

Jerry Rohan had flashed into the public eye much after the manner of a meteor. He'd cropped up first in the American Association, where his pitching average had been of a nature to bring a blush of shame to the cheeks of Marty O'Toole, and the Marines had bought him long before the close of the season. For the balance of the last major league season Jerry had warmed the bench, drinking in much baseball wisdom, and learning something of the game as it is played by men who know it from A to Z and then backward.

In Spring training he had fulfilled all prophecies. With the kinks still showing in the arms of several of the veteran twirlers, Jerry had twirled magnificent ball in the exhibition games of the training trip, and without the slightest seeming effort at that! New Orleans batters fanned at his shoots in one game and a measly scratch hit was the best that the whole aggregation could get. Other Southern Association teams had fared little better. And the grand climax had come when the Marines stacked up against the Baltimore Internationals, and only one man reached first base.

For the first week of the major league season, Manager Con O'Leary had been chary of trying out his youngster; but he had finally yielded to the clamor of the populace and sent Jerry in against the lightning Oaks. For eight innings Rohan pitched truly brilliant ball, and his teammates scored a quartet of runs as against none for their opponents.

And in the ninth had come one of those batting bees that have gone down into baseball history. Draper had started it, and when the smoke had cleared away the Oaks had six runs—and the game! So well had Jerry been going that no other pitcher had been warmed up; a managerial breach for which O'Leary felt himself personally responsible—but which did not soothe his resentment against the exploded phenom.

No sooner had Jerry left the club-house after the game than a bedlam of comment broke loose.

"Got 'is goat!" snapped Skimpy Werner aggressively. "They c'd have scored a doz-

Digitized by Google

en if they'd wanted to. But—" Skimpy was loyal to Jerry whom he liked—"why in God's name, Con, didn't you put Rudy in the box?"

"Couldn't! Rudy's arm was glass cold and it'd have been six of one and half-a-dozen of the other. Jerry had been goin' good—awful good——"

"What do you think of the kid?" questioned Sam Fremont of Dave Lincoln, the veteran catcher. "You were in a position to see the fireworks to best advantage."

"Case of goat," returned Lincoln instantly. "Major league début and all that. If the kid once gets his bearin's he'll be ripe for us; but he's nervous now——"

"A case of goat can be got over," remarked O'Leary sagely. "But when a man blows up when the game is in his pocket just because a couple of E-yah coachers slam it into him, I'm suspicious that it assays a yellow streak. Is that it, Dave?"

Lincoln fidgeted. He liked Jerry.

"I can't rightly tell, Connie. Maybe one, maybe t'other. It might be that they just got his goat——"

"And it might be that he's yeller?"

"It might——"

"I hate yeller."

"Give 'im a square chanst," pleaded Skimpy. "He's got the arm and the head——"

"Oh! I'll give him a chance all right; but the next time he goes in it'll be in a nerve-testing game—and, win or lose, he'd better show that he has the guts, or—good night!"

"The kid's worth a chance," insisted Dave Lincoln quietly. "He's got more on the ball than any man in the circuit. He's nervous. He may not be yellow. If they merely got his goat he'll be all right in the next game he twirls. If he ever does get his nerve——" he whistled expressively. "An' if he don't you can always farm him out."

O'Leary shrugged.

"I'll try him, all right, because he does look awf'ly good. I'll carry him on the road-trip. But if he continues to show the yeller——"

THE Marines had gotten away to a miserable start in the league race and every man in the crowd was in a more or less sullen humor. Feeling the pariah because of his miserable showing in his game against the Oaks, Jerry sat alone, hunched in section 10 and staring moodily out of the Pullman window at the flying landscape which was even then becoming hazy in the fast-gathering gloom. Dave Lincoln slouched down the aisle from the smoker and dropped into the seat beside him.

"Hello kid."

"'Lo!"

"Whence the grouch?"

"Humph!"

"Uncommunicative, eh? Lookin' f'r y'r goat?"

Jerry whirled—his rather handsome face contorted with passion.

"Listen here, Dave," he snapped furiously, "I'm not goin' to stand any more of that bunk—from you or any other man! Ever since that game yesterday the fellers have been treating me as if I was the chief high muck-a-muck of the bat-boy's union, instead of one of the pitchers. I've heard that word 'goat' until I'm ready to push in the face of the next guy who breathes it near me. I ain't no scrapper, but if they keep that thing up there's goin' to be fireworks, see?"

"Well?" encouraged Dave smilingly.

"Well—what?"

"Keep on chewing the rag about it, kid. It'll do you good. Let off steam. Tell your daddy all your troubles."

"You caught that game yesterday," pursued Jerry hotly. "You know it was just a case of nervousness——"

"Nerves or *nerve?*" questioned Dave significantly. "I'll be frank with you, kid—it looked like lack of nerve, and that's fatal to a ball-player no matter what else he has."

"It was nerves I tell you. It's the sort of thing that'd never happen again. Stage-fright they call it behind the footlights. I'm green to the majors, I know it. I haven't been steeled to the grueling of scientific batting, and when Draper made that double and then laughed at me and stole third while I held the ball, it got my goat for the minute. I couldn't find the plate to save my life, and whenever I did it was an ice-cream ball that they slammed where they wanted. But I'll tell you this much—I do know the pitching game, and—" his jaw snapped—"I don't care who hears me—I have got the class!"

"Yes, you have; and I'm darned glad to hear you admit that they got your goat yesterday. That'll make it easier the next time."

Digitized by Google

"Next time?" bitterly. "Lamp Con O'Leary, willya? Does he look like there's goin' to be any next time f'r me? Every time he catches my eye, I feel like duckin' behind a seat. He's dead sore and he won't try me out again. An' listen here, Dave: I've got more'n just me watchin' to see if I make good with the Marines. It means—it means——"

He flushed.

"O-ho!" The big catcher's eyes twinkled merrily. "So that's where the land lies. Congrats, Jerry."

"They're about a million years premature," bemoaned the young pitcher lugubriously. "She saw that game yesterday and was as cool as an ice-packed cucumber. And what can I ever do if I don't get a chance?"

"Listen! It isn't likely that Con's goin' to use you in the series with the Grays; but he's likely to run you in against the Millers if we have any chance at all. Beiger an' Stevens an' Harrington ain't goin' any too good themselves, an' he'll want to get back home all fresh for another chance at the Oaks. He told me that if he ever tried you again—to start a game that is—it'd be against the Oaks. After that—well, I advise you to make good, that's all."

"But——"

"Quit kiddin' y'rself, Jerry. Con's one of the best managers in the country an' he's goin' to yank us out of last place whether we want to go or not. An' he ain't goin' to pass up a good bet like you if you really have the goods. But I'll tell you this: Con's judgment is so good that he wouldn't have the least trouble in the world gettin' waivers if he asked for them. They all know if he's lettin' a man out, there's nothin' doing.

"An' if you stop to dope it all out, you can't well blame him for bein' sore at you. It wasn't as if you simply lost the game yesterday. We've lost ten out of our first thirteen; but it was that you lost your nerve. And a nerveless ball-player is about as useful as a handless watch. Get me?"

"I get you. And thanks—Dave!"

FOR the first six games of the road-trip Jerry cooled his heels on the bench and chafed under the aloofness of the other players. A loser they could stand for, but a quitter—never! It was not until the last game of the series with the Millers that Jerry got a chance. The Marines had been playing gilt-edged ball, and at the end of the first half of the fourth inning the score stood 7 to 0 in their favor.

O'Leary sighed with satisfaction. Here was the chance he had been patiently awaiting. Now he could send Jerry Rohan into the box with safety, and give him a bit of the seasoning he so much needed. Besides, Rudy Beiger was too good a man to waste with the Marines seven runs to the good.

"You go in next inning, Rohan," he said quietly. "An' remember, I'm watching you!"

Jerry remembered, and for the balance of the game he twirled beautiful ball. Only two hits were registered from his delivery, and the Marines added one run to their total. But Jerry remained glum after the game.

"Cheer up," counseled Dave heartily. "You held them down in great shape——"

"An' proved nothing! D'yuh think it took nerve to go into the box and pitch good ball with the game cinched and the whole blamed team suffering from astigmatism? Why they couldn't have hit the broad side of a barn this afternoon. I wish t' goodness he'd give me a real chanst. I'd show him!"

FINALLY the Marines returned home to stack up against the second-place Oaks in a four-game series. In the first game Pat Stevens pitched for the home team and pulled out a 3 to 2 victory, and the second day the fans flocked to the huge park to enthuse over another victory; this time the score being 4 to 1.

It seemed as if the Marines, always noted as late starters, had hit their stride. On the third day the stands were jammed with enthusiasts, and the game promised to be a hummer. Harrington and Lincoln were announced as the battery for the Marines, and Finissey and Angus for the Oaks.

The batting order which the crowd read on the big centerfield scoreboard was:

MARINES	OAKS
Con O'Leary, l.f.	Harry Longstreet, 3b.
Bert Dodge, 3b.	Jack Burrows, 2b.
Gil Collins, r.f.	Pete Draper, r.f.
Freddy Shirley, c.f.	Gus Jachs, c.f.
Skimpy Werner, s.s.	Clyde Harris, s.s.
Tinkle Bell, 1b.	Will Anderson, l.f.
Sam Fremont, 2b.	Art Kiling, 1b.
Dave Lincoln, c.	George Angus, c.
Fritz Harrington, p.	Larry Finissey, p.

Digitized by Google

From the jump it was a batting bee; a game of the hit-and-run variety such as keeps the fans on their toes and sends them home after it is all over scarcely able to make themselves understood for their hoarseness.

Longstreet, the first man up for the Oaks, slammed the ball into deep left for two cushions. Burrows sacrificed him to third, and he scored on Pete Draper's single. Then, after Gus Jachs had gone out, short to first, Anderson dropped a neat little single over second and Draper scored. Kiling hit a line drive to right which Gil Collins pulled down after a hard run, and the initial agony was over.

The Marines failed to score in their half of the first, and the Oaks added another run to their total in the second. But with a double, two singles, a sacrifice, a stolen base and a fielder's choice, the Marines took a one-run lead and the fans went wild. When the third inning opened Rudy Beiger had replaced Harrington in the box, and Bun Torrence went into the box for the Oaks.

For seven innings the game rocked along, a succession of hair-raising plays. In the fifth the Marines shoved one over the platter and in the eighth the Oaks made one more. At the beginning of the ninth inning the score-board showed five to four, in favor of the Marines:

OAKS	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	–
MARINES...	0	4	0	0	1	0	0	0	–

CLYDE HARRIS, first man up for the Oaks, waited patiently and drew a free pass to first. Anderson promptly dumped a neat little sacrifice down the first-base line and Harris took second. Kiling did the unexpected by bunting down the third-base line and caught Bert Dodge napping. He was safe on first, and Harris went to third on the play. Then Pete Stilwell was hit with the ball.

"Take y'r base!" ordered the umpire raucously.

Instantly the Marines flocked about him, protesting, arguing, shouting, gesticulating. The crowd awakened and howled maledictions. The Marines claimed that Stilwell stepped into the ball, but the arbitrator was firm, and Stilwell, who had replaced Angus when Torrence supplanted Finissey, went to first, filling the bases.

In a jiffy the entire aspect of the game had changed. From a nice one-run lead with only a half-inning to play, the Marines were suddenly fighting desperately against defeat. A single would mean two runs and the lead; a double would score three men. A long fly to the outfield would bring in a run!

Jerry watched the proceedings dully. And then quite by chance his foot kicked against one of the practise balls. He picked it up, inspected it without special interest, and then turned animatedly to Stump Young, the second-string catcher.

"C'mon!" he ordered curtly.

"F'r what?"

"Get y'r mitt and come behind the grandstand. I want to warm up a few."

Wonderingly Stump obeyed.

Torrence started for the plate swinging a heavy bat, but Kiling, manager of the Oaks, signaled from second.

"Send in Gallant," he bawled. Gallant was the Oaks' pinch-hitter. He strode to the plate smilingly oblivious to the derisive howls of the spectators.

Beiger was rattled—visibly so. The bases were full and there was only one man down. A single meant the game for the Oaks unless the Marines managed to tie the score in their half of the ninth; a highly improbable thing, as Torrence's failure to bat called for a fresh pitcher, and Lefty Earle, the star southpaw of the circuit, was warming up.

O'Leary was apprehensive. Stevens and Rohan were the only pitchers left whose arms were in condition, and Stevens had worked the previous day.

"Where's Rohan?" he called to Shirley.

"Just saw him go behind the grandstand with Stump."

"Humph!" But O'Leary smiled enigmatically.

The stand quieted as Beiger suddenly shot the ball to Lincoln.

"Ba-a-ll *un!*"

The runners danced far off the bases. Their cue was to run on anything. Again the ball whizzed wide of the plate.

"Ba-a-ll *tuh!*"

Some one in the bleachers yelled, "Take 'im out!" and it became a veritable chorus.

Then Jerry Rohan appeared from behind the grandstand. He saw Con O'Leary staring at him from the outfield, and waved his hand. For the fraction of a second the manager pondered and then he nodded affirmatively. Happily Jerry Rohan started

Digitized by Google

across the diamond. Dave Lincoln grinned as the youngster passed him.

"You've got 'em kid. This is *some* chance!"

Jerry smiled; a thin-lipped, straight, intent smile.

The situation was more than ticklish. The bases were filled, the Marines one run ahead; one man out and two balls and no strikes on the batter. And it was the Oaks who had originally taken Jerry Rohan's goat.

The leather-lunged coachers recalled the incident vociferously. They danced on the sidelines and yelled; they tossed huge handfuls of grass and sod high in the air as they imitated Hughey Jennings' "Ee-yah!" They gibed and taunted and derided and joked. Jerry merely smiled grimly as he hitched his belt a bit tighter and rubbed dirt on the ball.

The umpire motioned Gallant away from the plate and gave Jerry time for three warmers.

He took them slowly, deliberately; with all the ease and poise of a veteran. He shot them across without too much speed, striving in the three pitched balls to get his distance and the precise location of the plate. An error now would be fatal.

GALLANT stepped forward, and the silence of death fell over the crowded stands—only the coachers kept up their incessant, rattling, annoying chatter.

Lincoln signaled for a fast one—high up and close. Jerry smiled grimly and nodded negatively, signaling in return that he intended to cut the pan with a straight ball.

Over it came—the speed of it fairly bewildering. Gallant's bat never left his shoulder and he grinned foolishly as the umpire yelled:

"Strike!"

"Dare yuh to try it again," he begged.

"All right."

Jerry wrapped his long fingers around the sphere and once again it shot across like a bullet. Gallant swung, but the ball had already passed him.

"Stri-i-ke *tuh!*"

The spectators cheered nervously. O'Leary gasped at the daring of the youthful twirler.

With two balls and two strikes on the batter, the next one, by all the rules of the art, should have been wide of the plate, tempting bait for a nervous batter. Instead of that it was another one straight over the heart of the rubber. Gallant didn't even strike at it!

"T'ree strikes—an' *out!*"

The crowd went wild—transformed into so many thousands of raving, shrieking maniacs. Two out now; nothing but a hit could bring in the dreaded tallies.

Harry Longstreet, head of the Oaks' batting order, shambled aggressively to the plate. He eyed the young pitcher superciliously as he swung two heavy bats and then discarded one of them.

"Try me?" he invited.

"Too easy," parried Rohan.

He stood with his foot in the box, eying third. Then quick as a flash he turned and shot the ball over the pan.

"Stri-i-ke!"

Longstreet waved frantically at the umpire.

"Balk!" he howled. "That was a balk, Mr. Umpire!"

The crowd jeered.

"No balk," ruled the official. "Play ball!"

"Here comes another straight one—mebbe!" warned Jerry.

Longstreet glared silently.

Like a meteor it came sizzling to the plate. Longstreet set his body, swung sharply—and the ball hopped over his bat and spanked cozily into Lincoln's waiting mitt.

"Stri-i-ke *two-o!*"

"Two strikes and no balls," screamed Skimpy Werner from short. "Waste a few, kiddo, waste a few!"

"What's the use? He's easy."

The fans were dumfounded at the marvel of pitching skill and nerve which they were viewing.

In deep left Con O'Leary was scraping the ground first with one foot and then with the other and cursing fervently to himself.

"Oh! Lordy," he muttered excitedly, "if he can *only* get away with it—if he can only do it——"

Harry Longstreet was intensely nervous. The bases were jammed with runners. Two strikes and no balls had been called. The next one should come wide of the plate to draw him out—yet it should have done that in Gallant's case and Jerry had fed up a straight one.

Digitized by Google

Jerry delivered the ball sharply, yet with the full power of a body-flung delivery.

For a moment it looked as if his bluff had been carried too far. It hummed straight toward the plate. Longstreet swung.

Then the ball broke sharply away from the plate. The batter attempted to stop the force of his swing and succeeded only in executing a ridiculous strike!

"T'ree—an' *out!*" screamed the umpire, but his voice was lost in the bedlam which had broken loose.

Jerry Rohan's goat had returned!

OAKS	AB	R	H	PO	A	E
Longstreet, 3b	3	1	2	2	1	0
Burrows, 2b	4	0	0	0	4	0
Draper, r.f.	3	1	1	1	0	0
Jachs, c.f.	4	1	1	0	0	0
Harris, s.s.	3	0	0	3	5	1
Anderson, l.f.	2	0	1	1	0	0
Kiling, 1b	3	0	2	8	0	1
Angus, c.	1	0	0	2	1	0
*Stilwell, c.	3	1	0	6	1	0
Finissey, p.	1	0	1	0	1	0
**Torrence, p.	3	0	1	1	0	0
***Gallant	1	0	0	0	0	0
TOTALS	31	4	9	24	13	2

MARINES	AB	R	H	PO	A	E
O'Leary, l.f.	5	0	2	1	0	0
Dodge, 3b	4	1	1	2	3	1
Collins, r.f.	4	0	0	1	0	0
Shirley, c.f.	3	0	0	2	0	0
Werner, s.s.	4	1	3	0	6	0
Bell, 1b	3	0	0	10	1	1
Fremont, 2b	3	2	1	1	4	0
Lincoln, c.	3	0	2	7	1	0
Harrington, p.	1	1	1	1	2	0
†Beiger, p.	1	0	1	2	1	0
‡Rohan, p.	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTALS	31	5	11	27	18	2

* replaced Angus in the third. ** replaced Finissey in the third. *** batted for Torrence in the ninth. † replaced Harrington in the third. ‡ replaced Beiger in the ninth.

SCORE BY INNINGS

OAKS..... 2 1 0 0 0 0 0 1 0—4
MARINES.. 0 4 0 0 1 0 0 0 x—5

SUMMARY: Two base hits—Werner, Longstreet. Sacrifice hits—Burrows, Anderson, Bell. Stolen bases—O'Leary, Collins, Harris. Bases on balls, Off Finissey 2 in two innings, off Torrence 2 in five innings, off Harrington 2 in two innings, off Beiger 1 in six innings, off Rohan 0 in one inning. Struck out—by Finissey 1, by Torrence 2, by Harrington 1, by Beiger 5, by Rohan 2. Hit by pitched ball—Stilwell. Double plays—Dodge to Werner to Bell. Wild pitch — Finissey. Umpire — Carney. Time of game—1:55.

NORTHMAN'S SONG

By Richard Butler Glaenzer

OHÈ, my lass, though soft your arms
And sweet your mouth and cool your eyes,
The fire of travel has caught my heart,
Nor can I check its choking rise:
Through the close music of your charms,
I hear the whisper of the South:
For all your lips and all their sighs,
We part, my lass, we part!

Aiaì, my lass, though true your vows
And rich your love and strong your hands,
They can not hold a sailor's heart,
Nor he enforce their dear demands:
Rest is a dream, once man allows
The tides to touch the reins thereof:
I feel the pull of southern strands—
We part, my lass, we part!

Digitized by Google

Come-On Charley's Merry Christmas

By Thomas Addison

SCORE $850,000

IF YOU turn off from Times Square in the right direction and pick the right street, you will come presently, or even sooner, to The Goats' clubhouse. It is not an imposing structure, but it harbors an imposing aggregation of smooth-faced gentlemen whose opinion of themselves is limited only by the blue sky above.

A few of these have arrived by virtue of undoubted genius to distinguished eminence in the eyes of the world; others, by reason of some freak of feature, voice or figure, allied with a nimble wit, have found a short-cut to a temporary vogue which they fondly fancy is enduring fame; and the rest pack around with them individual spotlights in which they bask in the firm belief that a tardy Fate will view their merits and snatch the laurels from less worthy brows to crown their own.

All of these good perky persons take most seriously the fact that they are among the living in this day of grace; and they can conceive of no greater calamity to society than would be their premature elimination from the program of events.

They are a well-groomed, well-powdered, well-manicured lot of amiable, harmless egotists who speak English like the stewards on the transatlantic boats—and get by with it among themselves. And they call themselves The Goats because—we are only guessing at this—they have so often got the public's that they must have quite a herd of the pesky brutes penned up somewhere on the premises.

You may ask what all this has to do with Come-On Charley? The answer is, Charley was a Goat himself. And so was Mr. Percival Teeters, his secretary, friend and self-appointed mentor. They had been recently elected to fill vacancies in the resident membership of the club occasioned by resignations due to a hopeless pecuniary instability on the part of the resignors—a rather neat way of putting it, if any one should ask us.

The Goats, though "professional" in the

Editorial Note—*Samuel Drew*, a New York lawyer with a $10,000 bequest for Charles Arthur Carter ("Come-On Charley"), a clerk in a small New Jersey town, yields to a whimsical impulse (and other things), and tells *Come-On* this money is only the advance payment on a $2,000,000 bequest to come to him if he makes the $10,000 grow to $1,000,000. (Wants to see what a man can accomplish with just the *reputation* of having $2,000,000.) *Come-On* accepts the news placidly, moves to the Hotel Rirebien in New York, and becomes target for all the "con" men. Good-natured, easily approachable, yet somehow he always emerges winner instead of loser. Not such a fool as he seems, quick to learn from experience, doing very little talking, he adds a little each time to his original $10,000. *Percival Teeters*, his light-headed and slangy secretary; *Ball*, his newspaper friend; *Joe Link*, his boxing-instructor; and *Drew*, the lawyer, generally figure in his adventures.

Digitized by Google

main, gladly receive within their fold those choice spirits who have managed to cut some kind of caper in art, music, literature, sport, politics or other hazardous pursuits. Do this, and beat upon the portals of The Goats' house; you'll be taken in if you have the price and there's a vacant chair. The professional Goat must have an audience at all times or he would pine his heart away.

And thus it was that Mr. Carter became a Goat. He had long been eligible to the gild, but his late caper in Wall Street, whereby in one day he had looted that robber's roost of over half a million dollars, made him preëminently fit to wear the horns. As for Mr. Percival Teeters—known not unfrequently as Merciful Skeeters—he was born a goat; he needed no other qualification to admit him to the clan.

We see them now—Mr. Carter and his secretary—on their way to The Goats' where they have an appointment to lunch in the Dutch Room with Mr. Teddy Ball, a brother Goat, and sporting editor of the *Evening Scream*.

IT WAS Monday, the twenty-second day of December, and it was very cold. The club was not far from the Hotel Rirebien, yet Mr. Teeters would have ordered out the limousine—yes, they had a big French one now—but Mr. Carter vetoed this. He elected to walk.

Mr. Teeters knew why and he grumbled at it; he was a luxurious soul, was Mr. Teeters, and he loved to see the flunkies come running out bareheaded to help him from his cushioned nest to mother earth. It made him feel Lucullus-like—only he didn't know it by that name.

"Merry Moses, Come-On!" he piped querulously. "We've been walking everywhere for a week! We'll forget how to ride if you keep it up."

Charley did not answer. He had stopped short and was dropping a bright new silver dollar into the upturned palm of a beggar—a barrel-house product if ever there was one. But it made no difference with Charley.

"Merry Christmas, pard!" he said, and walked on leaving the wretched toper crying whisky into his whiskers.

Both of Charley's overcoat-pockets sagged with silver, all dollars fresh from the mint; and he had gone to a lot of trouble to get them.

"You look like you was carrying weight for age," quarreled Mr. Teeters. "Why can't you chuck it out the car-window and let 'em scramble for it?"

"Because," said Charley simply, "I'm not throwing bones to dogs."

"Huh!" snorted Mr. Teeters, finding no suitable reply immediately at hand.

A girl with a broad red band around her bonnet was standing by a kettle on the corner ringing a bell. Charley let fall two silver dollars into the kettle as he passed.

"Merry Christmas!" he saluted.

"God bless you, sir!" the girl called after him.

Mr. Teeters wiggled his mustache and marched on at Charley's side frowning thoughtfully. Presently the idea he was seeking popped into his mind and exploded into speech.

"Say, Come-On! Why don't you give it all to the Salvation Army and let them do the work?"

Charley glanced at him in a puzzled sort of way.

"Where do I come in?" he asked.

"Pink pills!" exclaimed the secretary petulantly. "You give the dough, don't you?"

"Sure," said Charley. "But I don't get the fun. Look! Watch her eyes!"

They had crossed Broadway. Coming toward them, up the side-street they had turned into, was an old woman bent over in feeble resistance to the biting wind. She was wrapped in a long, faded, threadbare coat which she clutched to her throat with a shriveled claw. Want and misery, and the vice that companions them, were stamped on her face as with a brand from the devil's own brazier.

Charley stepped in front of her. She halted and stared at him, suspicious and afraid. Charley held out his hand. In it were five shining silver dollars. The old woman's lack-luster eyes grew wide and lighted up with the eager, ravening desire of a famished thing which has stumbled on its prey. And yet she was fearful, it seemed, of some cruel trick this grave young man was about to play on her. She reached out for the money and as quickly drew away, leaving it untouched.

Charley smiled at her.

"Merry Christmas!" he said, as if the phrase summed up all needful explanation.

She understood him now. Charley laid the silver in the creature's shaking, outstretched hand, and as he did so the avid

Digitized by Google

light in her eyes was drowned in a rush of tears. They left her, choking and struggling for speech, and went on. Mr. Teeters was fumbling in his trousers pocket.

"Wait a minute, Come-On!" he cried of a sudden.

He had drawn forth a fistful of loose change. He did not stop to count it, but ran back to the woman and thrust it upon her. She said something to him—Charley could not hear from where he stood—but Mr. Teeters waved it away with a lordly gesture and returned with his narrow chest puffed out.

"Got the old dame's nanny that time," he remarked complacently.

"Nothing like it," said Charley soberly. "Fun. Don't want any Army crabbing it."

"But they'd make the coin go a good deal farther," Mr. Teeters argued. "I been keeping tab on you, Come-On, and you've frisked yourself in less'n a week of a roll as big as a bolster. I ain't kicking on that play we made just now—the cards fell right for it—but it's the bums and soaks you tumble for. The Army could feed five hundred of those bottle-babies for what you've slipped to fifty of 'em."

"Sure," said Charley. "Machine-made Christmas. Good, if you like it. But suppose you'd rather drink than eat? Where's your Christmas?"

This, we concede, was a primitive view of the great annual day of regulation merry-making, but like all things primitive the salt of truth was in it. Mr. Teeters not being a moralist and much less a theologian, was at loss for a rejoinder. Like many a better man, when cornered, he dodged the issue.

"You've cut loose from eight dollars in ten minutes," he complained. "And it's two days yet to Christmas! Where do you get off on this stunt anyway—in the hock-house?"

"I'm just practising," Charley answered. "Getting a gait."

They had reached The Goats' Club and Mr. Teeters paused with his foot on the lower step.

"Hey?" he queried mistrustfully. "You got to make a quick finish if you're only practising. What's the little joke up your sleeve now, Come-On?"

Charley grinned at him. It was not a wide grin, though, for he was dead in earnest.

"Not there," he said. "In the bank. I'm trying to scheme out how to do it."

Mr. Teeters gave vent to an impatient exclamation.

"Do what?"

"Give away some real money, myself, between now and Christmas Eve."

Mr. Teeters removed his foot from the step and laid hold of Mr. Carter's arm with both hands. The action suggested self-defense—as if he would stay an impending blow. For Mr. Teeters knew his chief was given to deplorable resolves which all his secretarial skill could not abate, and which sometimes floored him flat.

"How much, Come-On?" he demanded breathlessly. "Five hundred?"

"Ten thousand," said Charley quietly.

"Gollamighty!" gasped Mr. Teeters, and fell away from him.

He not only fell away from Mr. Carter, but fell up the steps and butted headlong into the doorman, who had sprung out to assist him, which, if you will stop to think of it, was a quite appropriate entrance for a Goat to make into the fold.

II

WHILE Charley and Mr. Teeters are getting their coats checked, let us look in on Mr. Theodore Ball, of the *Evening Scream*, who is waiting to entertain them.

It was the off-season in the sporting editor's line, and he was out hunting for feature stories of any kind. Hence a telephoned invitation to Mr. Carter and his secretary to lunch with him at The Goats'. Mr. Carter was a mine of unxepected pay-streaks which Mr. Ball had worked aforetime with profit to his paper and himself. The last time it netted him a red strip across the front page and ready money in his pocket—the day U. S. Paper Collars dropped from 70 to 48½ inside of three short hours.

The never-to-be-too-highly esteemed dear reader may remember something of this. If he doesn't the fault is ours, due to native incapacity, in not making the circumstance stand out among the peaks of story-telling. We refer to the "pool" on the historic day just mentioned from which, in Charley's wake, Mr. Teeters, Mr. Link and Mr. Drew, in company with Mr. Ball, emerged with neat little bundles of Wall Street boodle ranging from twelve hundred dollars each

Digitized by Google

for the first and last named to twenty-four hundred dollars for Mr. Link and twelve thousand for Mr. Drew.

Charley's own profit for his week in The Street touched $700,000 which, added to what he already had in bank, made his earnings on his original ten - thousand - dollar "starter" from Mr. Drew total $850,000. Not bad for an "easy mark," so taken and accepted among the gentlemanly pirates in Wall Street and contiguous territory!

Mr. Ball was thinking of this as he waited for his guests; possibly something else was afoot with Charley that would pan out a scare-head, if not more dollars in his purse.

IT WAS late for luncheon and the enterprising representative of the *Scream* had the low-raftered, squat Dutch grill-room to himself. He was half reclining on a Dutch settle before a heavy oak Dutch table in a corner near the wide Dutch fireplace when Mr. Carter and his secretary came clattering across the Dutch tiled floor to him. He sat up straight on the settle, and a knowledge of Dutch being a gift denied him he was forced to salute his friends in homespun English.

"Hello, sports!" he shouted cheerily. "What's the news?"

"You can search me," invited Charley, helping himself to a chair.

Mr. Teeters said nothing. He took the other chair and sat down, breathing hard. His mustache was wiggling, and this to Mr. Ball was a sign and omen not to be neglected. But he waited until the lunch was on the table before probing into the secretary's mental clockworks. Then he asked:

"What's the matter, Merciful? Wound up so tight you can't strike?"

Mr. Teeters broke his silence tumultuously. He struck twelve all at once.

"Come-On's got a bug! He's looney as a lobster!"

This looked promising to Mr. Ball.

"What special breed is biting you, Charley?" he delicately inquired.

"Skeeters," grinned Mr. Carter, and went on placidly with his Blue Points.

"It's a Christmas bug!" blatted Mr. Teeters. "He's Christmas crazy, Teddy. He's going to peddle out ten thousand bucks to all the Hop-Along Henrys the cops ain't got in the coop."

Mr. Ball, who had just started an oyster on the way to its long home, swallowed it under forced draft and then gulped out—

"O mother!"

He saw the makings of a red strip dancing before his eyes and was exceeding glad.

"Is this pretty boy stating facts, or just playing with his odds and ends of language?" he prayed Mr. Carter to inform him.

"Sure," said Charley.

"Sure what?" Mr. Ball demanded sternly. "You *are* going to give away ten thousand dollars to the poor this Christmas?"

"I said it," Charley replied, leaning back and returning the *Scream* man's fervid gaze.

"Ha!" ejaculated Mr. Teeters. "Didn't I tell you, Teddy! The stitching in his beanbag is coming loose."

"Sh-h-h!" Mr. Ball raised a warning hand. "Watch what I'm going to do." He beckoned to the waiter and said to him: "Bring us a quart of Verzenay. Hurry! It's life and death!"

Mr. Teeters blinked at hearing this and ran his tongue around his lips. He loved champagne.

"You're feeling strong today?" he praised his host. "Six dollars a bucket!"

"I owe it to you, Teet, old bird, for soothing my declining years," Mr. Ball assured him. "Charley, how are you going to do it, and when and where?"

"Don't know," said Charley. "Trying to dope it out. Job."

"Want any help?"

"Sure," said Charley. "Throw a line."

"All right. Hire the Garden and give a relay dinner. Ten thousand dollars will feed thirty thousand people; fill 'em so full you'd have to button up their mouths to keep it in."

Mr. Carter gave his views on Christmas charity-dinners with the same admirable succinctness with which he had stated them to Mr. Teeters.

"Good!" agreed Mr. Ball. "Every man his own Santa Claus. That's the idea, is it? And you want to hand it out yourself? All right. In just a minute."

The waiter had come with the wine, and another was placing on the table grilled chicken wings and a "*polonaise of petits pois de Paraguay*," or some such kitchen murder of a noble language. When this was done and the wine poured Mr. Ball bade the attendants go away somewhere and meditate upon their sins. Then he turned to Mr. Carter.

Digitized by Google

"Get an air-ship, fly low, drop the seeds as you flit along, and scoot off till the riot's over," he advised. "You could change your name and come back in a month or two when police weren't feeling sore."

"Fine!" applauded Charley. "Only one objection."

"What?" pressed Mr. Ball.

"I don't want to go away."

Mr. Teeters had drained his glass and was beginning to look on Mr. Carter's lunacy with indulgence. Another glass would make him see real merit in it, and with a third he would probably claim the idea as his own. Wine worked wonders with Mr. Teeters' wits.

"Shucks!" he exclaimed contemptuously. "It's easy as mixing mush with milk. Hire a hall, and when it's full lock the doors and pass around the pudding."

"By George!" cried Charley. "Good scheme, Percy. Bully!"

"Pooh!" Mr. Ball puffed the notion to the idle winds. "You wouldn't reach the unwashed brother at all. You'd have a houseful of chorus-girls and bank-directors looking for another daffy dollar."

"Keep them out," said Charley. "Only let the poor in."

Mr. Ball regarded him compassionately.

"Say, how are you planning to give away the money, my dear young Christian friend?"

Charley thought a minute.

"Dollar apiece," he answered.

The *Scream* man laughed mockingly.

"Why, you boob, you couldn't squeeze the mob inside the Hippodrome if it was twice as big! And if you could, they'd wreck it as soon as you began to shell your corn. I know these Weary Willies' artless ways, my son; they'd make a prairie full of wild bulls look like pet lambs compared to 'em."

"Gee!" said Charley. "Never thought of that. Up a stump."

"We got to do it some way," vowed Mr. Teeters who was finishing his second glass. "What's the matter with me skating up one side of the Bowery and Charley up the other feeding it out as we slide along?"

"Oh, nothing—nothing at all," jeered the sporting editor. "They'd only have to call out the reserves; and you'd eat your Christmas dinner on the Island."

"Merry Moses!" yapped Mr. Teeters, reaching for the bottle. "Can't you give away a box of greens in this bum burg without getting bawled out for it?"

"Not the way Charley wants to do it," returned Teddy.

"Got another idea," announced Charley.

"O my aunt!" murmured the reporter. "What is it, dearie?"

"Give away ten-dollar bills instead of dollars. Not so many people, but make a better Christmas for them."

"That's more like it," conceded Mr. Ball. "But let's do a little figuring. It's a thousand stockings, in a way of speaking, you've got to fill. You can't get started till tomorrow, and that gives you only two days to turn the trick in. If you walked around twelve hours a day hunting up your hoboes you couldn't make a finish. Do you know what the stunt is? Forty-one hand-outs every hour! One every ninety seconds without stopping to eat, drink or cuss. It can't be did, sweet son of mine!"

"Bet you a hundred," said Charley, unperturbed by this line of argument. "Must be a way. Got to think it up."

"Let me get you straight," earnestly requested Mr. Ball. "You are going to pass out yourself—individually—ten dollars each to a thousand people between Tuesday morning and Wednesday night? Is that right?"

Charley nodded. Mr. Ball hurriedly rammed his hand into his inside pocket.

"Don't move," he begged. "Look pleasant. I'm going to take you."

He pulled out a checkbook, uncapped a fountain-pen and began to write.

"I've got a little of that Paper Collar money left," he chuckled. "I'll send along another century to swell it up a bit."

Mr. Teeters decreased his third glass to an irreducible minimum, and began feeling in his pockets also.

"You can't bluff me!" he bragged. "I got some of that Collar stuff myself. When me and Come-On start anything we play it to the knock-out."

"My! My!" sniggered Mr. Ball. "Hear the Skeeters buzz! What a Merry Christmas my bank-account is going to have!"

There were three books on the table now; for Charley, at Mr. Ball's first move, had quietly proceeded to make good his wager. When the checks were all written the newspaper man swept them to one side and weighed them down with the saltcellar.

"We'll leave them in the office when we

Digitized by Google

go out," he said. "Now, boys—" he turned serious all at once—"you know there's a story for me in this, don't you?"

"Hey?" croaked Mr. Teeters. "Story?"

Charley looked at Mr. Ball, frankly puzzled.

"Don't quite get you," he stated. "Only making Christmas presents."

"O my suffering soul!" moaned the *Scream* man. "They don't see it! Look me in the eye!" he commanded them austerely. "Even in New York when some one takes ten thousand dollars and scatters 'em all over the landscape it's apt to attract attention. People mention it to one another, you know, by way of making conversation. And they like to read about it. Now I don't want to pick this plum till it's ripe, understand?"

Charley nodded gravely.

"Get you now. Want to print it."

"Safe hit," commended Mr. Ball. "I could make a yell about it today and tell what you're going to do. But that's not the point—it's how you're going to do it that rings the bell. You'll have to hatch out some sort of a plan by tomorrow morning or you'll be left at the post for fair. Until then you are not to breathe a word of this to any one who might pass it on to a reporter. This story is my meat, and I'm going to serve it up sizzling hot in the *Scream* tomorrow with all-alone sauce. It's what they call a scoop, dear Children of the Abbey, and I'm the scooper. Does that reach you?"

"Sure," said Charley. "Keep it mum, friend. Anything to oblige."

Mr. Teeters cackled vinously, and was about to add a word of wit to all this wisdom when from the adjoining room came an irruption that smote him dumb.

III

A BALD-HEADED young man of a sneering and pale and pimply visage strode boisterously in. He was dressed in the last cry of fashion, and obviously had been holding close communion with evil spirits—though the label on the bottle said otherwise. It was not this gentleman's unlovely facial aspect that silenced Mr. Teeters, nor yet his clothes which struck his fancy smartly; it was a sheaf of yellow bank-notes he waved above his burnished crest, as if he would make a halo for it.

Several men had followed on the heels of this apparition and stood ranged about him like a chorus. One of them grinned at Teddy Ball and made motions, entirely superfluous, derogatory to the pimply person's sobriety.

"Name is Arthur Arrington. In on a card. Old man left him twenty millions."

Mr. Ball imparted this information *sotto voce* behind his hand to his companions, while Mr. Arrington stood leering at them and seeking for some expression which might electrify his new audience. He found it finally.

"I'm from Pittsburg!" he proclaimed.

"Pittsburg?" Mr. Ball cocked a solemn eye at his mates. "Pittsburg? Ever heard of it?"

"Ha! Ha!" laughed Mr. Arrington sardonically. "Funny as a funeral, ain't you? Pennsylvania's in Pittsburg, if you want to know, and it's where the dead-game sports come from."

He strutted over to them and looked them up and down challengingly.

"Dead-game sports!" he repeated. "Bet on anything—from how far a jellyfish can jump to—to—" he veered around to the other men— "what was it? Oh! To whether you can hold a crowd on Broadway for sixty minutes by the watch. I say it can't be done, and there's not a Goat in the bunch who'll take me up! Somebody's bleached their livers for 'em."

Come-On Charley surveyed him stolidly. Mr. Teeters' fascinated eyes were glued to the yellowbacks. He caught a glimpse of an M on one of them and shivered pleasurably.

"Oh, I say, Arrington, you know," protested an indignant Goat with a perfect *Aquitania* accent, "you fly a bit too high for us, old chap. You jolly well know we haven't the oof."

"He will only lay in thousands, Ball," complained a second injured Goat. "Too deuced stiff, you know, my boy, to take a chawnce."

Mr. Arrington fanned the air again with his batch of bills.

"Bring on somebody who's alive!" he whooped. "Here's five thousand to say it can't be done."

This was a little ambiguous, perhaps, but no one seemed to notice it.

"How about it, Carter?" hinted Goat Number Two. "We thought maybe—eh? For the honor of the Club—what?"

Digitized by Google

Mr. Ball hereupon made the gentlemen acquainted; he saw another story peeping at him from around the corner—one that he could use right off. Mr. Carter acknowledged the introduction and took a swallow of wine. It was as if he would wash down a bad taste in his mouth.

"Oh, your liver's red, is it?" catechised the Smoky City citizen in his pleasantly ingratiating way. "Glad to find a live sport in this morgue. Are you on?"

Charley gazed steadily at him for a moment, and there was a glint in his hazel eyes which Mr. Teeters recognized. He had seen it there on one or two occasions when the con men were making ready to spring their little trap, blissfully unconscious of the hole in it.

"Are you on?" The pimply one renewed the invitation belligerently. "If you marry, murder, jump off the roof, or blow your brains out on Broadway they won't stop long enough to ask who you are. The bet is: one man can't do anything that'll hold the crowd an hour; not if he could turn himself inside out and show 'em how his heart worked—and his liver!" He added this with his amiable laugh.

"You're drunk," said Charley to him coldly. "Come back when you're sober."

Mr. Arrington received this in a quite unexpected manner. It seemed to tickle his sense of humor.

"Drunk? Great guns! I'm only warming up to trot a heat tonight. I'll show you some speed if you stick around. Me drunk—now? What d'ye think of that?"

He appealed in high glee to his friends.

"He's just normal, Carter, really," said one of them reassuringly. "Knows what is what. It's up to you, old man."

Mr. Teeters suddenly bethought himself of his responsibilities as guide and mentor to his chief.

"Come-On, you got all you can handle," he warned.

"Good night!" scoffed the gentleman from Pittsburg. "His liver's turning yellow. I'm going out to Woodlawn where they've buried all the live ones."

"Wait!" Charley spoke the word quietly, but there was a ring to it that made the other wheel around to him. "What do you call a crowd?"

"Oh, a thousand. That's a tidy bunch to hold together for an hour," rejoined Arrington with a liberal air.

"Good," said Charley. "Make the bet ten thousand and I'll go you."

"Wow!" barked Teddy Ball.

The other Goats, taken off their guard, pressed about the table and chorused in plain American:

"Bully boy, Charley! That's the stuff! Make him squeal!"

But Mr. Arrington, whatever else he may have been—and that was a lot you wouldn't want to be—was no squealer.

"Why, he's come to life!" he remarked, affecting a supreme astonishment. "Make it twenty."

"Better scheme than that," said Charley coolly. "Ten thousand first hour. Ten thousand every hour after."

"What? You think you can hold a crowd more than an hour?" The pimply Pittsburger laughed his unbelief.

"Maybe," Charley told him. "Got to think it out."

"I guess you have!" gibed the bald one. "How'd a four-hour limit strike you—you to lose for every hour you don't hold 'em—what?" And he laughed again.

Mr. Ball interfered here.

"You call yourself a sport, do you?" he mocked. "Why, you're simply looking for an easy place to fall on! Afraid you'll lose a dime. Go back to Vicksburg—or whatever you call it—and play marbles with the other little boys. You don't belong in a real town."

Arrington's bald head took on a sunset hue. He was red, doubtless, to his toes.

"If I lose I pay double for every hour after the first," he blazed at the reporter. "You didn't wait to hear me out. I'm no sure-thing piker, and don't you forget it."

"That's different," returned Mr. Ball composedly. "What do you say, Charley?"

"Suits me. Fix it anyway you want."

"Then," said Mr. Ball to Mr. Arrington, "either put up, shut up, or blow up, but be quick about it, for I've got to get busy on the phone."

Mr. Arrington put up. With twenty million dollars at your back, to be a dead-game sport is written in the part. He drew a preliminary check for ten thousand payable to Charley, and Charley drew his check accordingly. They were deposited with the other checks in the office. The time limit for the feat was Christmas Eve, and a committee was appointed to keep tally of

Digitized by Google

the crowd when Charley should give notice he was ready.

"How are you going to pull it off, Charles?" Mr. Ball asked him privately before ringing up his paper.

Charley's lips curved at the corners.

"Don't know," he confessed. "Got to do some thinking."

IT WAS growing dark when he and Mr. Teeters left The Goats', and it was growing colder. The secretary pulled up the collar of his overcoat and sunk his chin in it, grumbling as he stepped along. The wine had staled in him by now.

"I wouldn't ask a dog to walk a night like this," he wailed. "There's that wagon in the garage getting spider-webs hung on it, and we out pounding down the pave as if we was drawing pay for it!"

"Exercise," said Charley cheerfully, "makes you feel good."

"Huh!" groaned Mr. Teeters. "You got a right to feel first rate, I don't think. You stand to hand yourself a phony Christmas present—a loss of forty thousand bones. And I tried to stop you!"

Charley answered him with the gravity of a deacon passing the plate.

"Ought to do something for it, Skeeters."

"Do something for what?" inquired Mr. Teeters testily.

"Your liver. Made of chalk," said Charley. And then he laughed.

When they got back to the Rirebien Charley's pockets were the lighter by half a dozen other silver dollars, bestowed mostly on blue-lipped, numb-fingered little news venders who straightway forgot the cold and burst into pyrotechnical exclamations of delight.

"It's worth the money," Charley declared as the last shrieking youngster darted off, and they turned into the hotel.

They went up to dress for dinner. They were going to the theater afterward to see "The Undertaker's Widow," a new play of the brand of humor they weep over in Boston and laugh themselves to death at in New York. They had made their change, and were lolling about in the sitting-room smoking a preprandial cigarette when Samuel Drew, Esq., walked in on them. He held a late edition of the *Scream* in his hand.

"What does this mean?" he asked, exhibiting a black strip-head across the front page. It read:

CAN COME-ON CHARLEY CASH IN?

"Let's have a peek at it!" Mr. Carter replied sedately.

He glanced over the story the fertile-minded Mr. Ball had telephoned to his paper. Mr. Drew sat down and watched him.

"Well?" he demanded when Charley finished.

The boy's eyes flickered as he met the question.

"All there," he said. "Know as much as I do."

"Good Lord! Do you mean to say you haven't any plan?" cried the astounded lawyer.

"Not yet," said Charley calmly.

"And if you had," went on the other, "don't you know you couldn't work it? The police wouldn't let you. A thousand people four hours—in Broadway! It can't be done!"

"That's what Arrington said," observed Charley with a grin.

Mr. Teeters who, for him, had kept an uncanny silence, here piped up.

"Come-On's got a kink in his cut-off. He's letting out all his steam."

"What?" The attorney looked suspiciously at Mr. Carter. "Are you meditating any more fool flings like that?"

He pointed to the paper which Charley had tossed on the table.

"Oh, no!" put in Mr. Teeters cynically. "He ain't fixing to do a thing but skin his roll till it bleeds. He's only meditating a Merry Christmas for a bunch of bums!"

"Yes?" said Mr. Drew softly. It was his way when greatly tried. "Now will you be good enough, Mr. Merciful Skeeters, to translate that into English? I'm a plain man and my vocabulary is painfully circumscribed."

Thus exhorted Mr. Teeters related Mr. Carter's purpose as lucidly as his wayward tongue would let him.

"Well," remarked the portly advocate when he was in possession of the facts, "if a man has ten thousand dollars to give away, on Christmas, I have nothing to say; that's his business. But if the man is a friend of mine and he starts to ambulate around this town playing Santa Claus with sudden

Digitized by Google

death, that's my business, and I'll have him locked up."

"Skeeters will go along," said Charley soberly. "Good in a scrap."

The hint of sudden death Mr. Drew had so subtly thrown out did not, however, sit well on Mr. Teeters' spiritual stomach. It was a new slant at Charley's Christmas merrymaking which had not occurred to him.

"Say, Come-On!" he broke out. "Mr. Drew is right. Some guy may slip a skewer in my chitlings and make a mess of 'em. That don't get me extra hard—I'm dated up for Christmas Day, and I want to keep it. And you—you're shy that million yet you got to make."

"Yes," interjected Mr. Drew, "and he's in a fine way to set himself back forty thousand, to say nothing of the other ten."

Charley grinned at them both and rose from his chair.

"Dinner time. Hungry. Let's go down," he suggested.

"I'll do it," assented Mr. Drew with emphasis, "because I'm going to keep an eye on you, young man, till after Christmas. And I give you fair warning—at the first overt act of lunacy on your part I'll have you clapped behind the bars.

"Who," he added threateningly, "will that two million go to, your Uncle William left, if you get yourself knocked on the head?"

Charley paused with his hand on the door-knob and regarded his questioner with serious eyes.

"I wonder." he said.

IV

CHARLEY succeeded, with some trouble, in securing an extra seat for "The Undertaker's Wedding," and Mr. Drew, in his rôle of Cerberus, went along with them. When they arrived at the theater they found a queue reaching from the box-office into the street waiting to buy seats; and the lobby was thronged with people pouring like cold molasses through a funnel, past the ticket-taker, who at that hour was the busiest man in the borough.

The little party from the Rirebien were in turn poured into the foyer, and it was while they were on their way to the cloak-room the great idea came to Charley. He stopped suddenly and exclaimed:

"By George! Say! I've got it!"

"Got what?" queried Mr. Teeters.

"How to give away that Christmas money."

"Humph!" grunted Mr. Drew. "If you'd found a way to win that bet of yours you'd be saying something."

"Got that fixed up too," said Charley.

"Oh, you have! And how, pray?" Mr. Drew's tone was satirically suave.

"The way I'm going to give the ten thousand wins the forty," Charley told him.

"Merry Moses!" chirruped Mr. Teeters. "That's clear as mud! What's the catch, Come-On?"

"No catch. Easy. Tell you about it to-morrow. Noon. Not before," said Charley.

And that was all they could get out of him. It spoiled a roaring farce for Mr. Teeters, who was as inquisitive as an ape. He sat through it like a hired mute at a funeral, his thoughts astir with everything except—as you might say—the corpse.

THE next morning his plight was even worse. Charley instructed him to call up Teddy Ball at the *Scream* office and ask him to come to the Rirebien at one o'clock; and then he drove off all alone in the neglected limousine, leaving his secretary about to pass away with a plague of curiosity.

As the machine rounded the corner into Broadway, Charley saw Mr. Drew turning in from that thoroughfare toward the hotel. Their eyes met at the same moment, and the lawyer halted and gestured to him. But Mr. Carter, leaning forward to the door, simply showed his teeth in the broadest of broad grins, and in this provoking pose was swept from the other's sight.

His first call was on Mr. Verdant Wise, manager of the Allrott Theater. Everybody knows where that is. Going in one direction it is on the left-hand side of Broadway between Columbus Circle and Madison Square. Going in the other direction it is on the right-hand side. Of late it was particularly easy to find because of the crowds that nightly kept away from it. Three failures in succession had made a theatrical pest-house of the place.

Mr. Wise sat in his office, dark of brow and peeved in manner, when Mr. Carter was ushered in. Possibly he was silently concocting curses to call down on hapless playwrights who couldn't concoct successes;

Digitized by Google

but after Charley had talked with him five minutes the clouds lifted somewhat from Mr. Wise's melancholy front and his bearing brightened. He became as nearly human as is permitted to his class. He could see the advertising value in Mr. Carter's proposition, and jumped at it as a hungry toad jumps at flies.

Charley next paid a call on the captain of the police precinct in which the Allrott Theater languished. He left that worthy in a state of partial coma when he came away—surprise, agitation and profound perplexity having very nearly done for him.

From the police station Mr. Carter drove down to his bank and made arrangements to have a thousand ten-dollar gold pieces delivered to him at the Rirebien in the afternoon.

He got back to his rooms a little after twelve. He had telephoned from the bank for Mr. Joseph Link to meet him at the hotel, and he found him waiting. Mr. Link, as the reader knows, was Mr. Carter's boxing-master, and former middleweight champion of the white-man's world—an Irishman by birth, whose brogue had been largely refined away by a persistent residence in New York, where a catch-as-catch-can sort of English is the prevailing medium of lingual expression.

With Mr. Link waited Mr. Drew and Mr. Teeters. Teddy Ball was also there, but he wasn't waiting; he was effervescing—foaming with impatience. He boiled over entirely when Mr. Carter made his appearance.

"Do you think we're getting out a monthly magazine?" he stormed. "One o'clock! Why didn't you say next week? Do you want the other papers to beat me to it? From what this yap Skeeters has to say you're all choked up with a story I ought to have out on the street right now. And you running round loose with it all over town!"

"Pay no heed to him, Charley," spoke up Mr. Link. "It's a way they have with them, these newspaper lads, when they get too full of ink. It goes to their head."

"Come-On——" began Mr. Teeters.

"Shut up!" Mr. Ball politely bade him. "Charley, I've got a taxi down below, with steam up ready to break the limit. Will you spit out that story yourself or must I cut it out of you with a knife?"

Mr. Carter, who had been leisurely divesting himself of his overcoat, took a seat and said to Mr. Link:

"Joe, got a job for you. Going to have ten thousand dollars here today. Gold."

"Saints above!" cried Mr. Link. "And what have I to do with that?"

Charley grinned at him.

"Want you to sit on it all night. Keep the dust off."

Teddy Ball leaped from his chair and began with elaborate care to roll up his sleeves.

"I'm preparing to strangle you, Mr. Come-On Charley, if you don't disgorge that story," he proclaimed. "Out with it, or say your prayers!"

Charley grinned again.

"Nothing much to tell," he answered. "Going to start at eight o'clock tomorrow. Give away ten dollars every quarter minute till twelve. Makes ninety-six hundred dollars. Last man gets four hundred extra. Makes ten thousand. That's all—simple!"

"All?" screamed Mr. Ball in agony of spirit. "O Misery Mike, can I keep from murdering this idiot! How are you going to do it? That's the story. HOW?"

"Sure," said Charley. "Forgot that. Ticket-window, Allrott Theater. Hand money out instead of in. First come, first served."

"Lord love us!" boomed Mr. Link. "He talks like 'tis only soup-tickets he's going to pass around!"

Mr. Ball gasped. The market-value of the project to the *Scream* dazzled him. When he had caught his breath he shouted—

"By heaven, I believe he's hit it! There's no law I know of to prevent. Is there?" he appealed to Mr. Drew.

That gentleman, who was gazing at Charley as if he were a freak of nature just brought to his attention, slowly shook his head.

"I don't think so," he said. "I'll have to look it up. It's a charity, and that helps. But the procedure may incite a riot. Why—good Lord—Broadway will be jammed! When they read in the papers tonight what he's going to do the whole East Side will start running to be there on time. The police will have their troubles."

"That's another story for tomorrow," exulted Mr. Ball; and with this he shot out of the room.

Mr. Teeters hopped up from the couch

Digitized by Google

he was sitting on with a squawk of joy.

"Come-On, you'll win your bet with that hooray hick from Pittsburg!"

"Thought of that," acknowledged Charley. "Two birds with one stone."

"And I'll win mine with Teddy," clacked Mr. Teeters. "Ha!" He addressed the lawyer. "Going to lock him up, was you? Going to put him in a foolery for funny folks with thingumbobs in their thinkeries? O gosh, I wish I was a wise guy like some I know!"

Mr. Drew waved him away with an absent air—as he would a gnat or other irksome insect. He spoke to Charley:

"If you hold the crowd two hours you win thirty thousand. That's ten to the good even if you lose on the other two hours."

"Right," Charley answered. "What about it?"

"Oh, nothing," said Mr. Drew in a carefully careless tone. "You have a chance—just a chance—and-er-I was wondering if there is any first or second hour Arrington money——"

"Faith, and that's just what I was wondering meself," cut in Mr. Link, getting to his feet. "And what's more I'm going out to look for it—all four hours by St. Patrick! I'm betting on the lad's good luck."

He strode over to the door. Mr. Drew rose hastily from his chair.

"Just a minute, Link," he called. "I'd like to have a word with you—outside."

He shook his fist at Charley, who was wide agrin, and scowled horrendously at Mr. Teeters, who was goggling at him. And he banged the door as he went out. It was not a very masterly retreat, but it sufficed. Mr. Teeters, with his accustomed modesty, took merit to himself for it. He began to cackle.

"You can stab me to the heart, Come-On, if I didn't back the old rooster down!" he crowed.

"Sure," said Charley solemnly. "Backed him clean off his perch. You're a wonder, Skeeters!"

V

IMAGINE, please, a line of block type an inch and a quarter high running across the face of the *Scream* like a streak of scarlet fever. Imagine it, kind reader, for to reproduce it here would take the width of three of these printed pages placed side by side, and we are informed that this is seldom, if ever, done except where the author owns the magazine. If you can imagine such a thing as that you can imagine without an effort the red strip in the *Scream* on the evening of December twenty-third, in the year we have not already mentioned. It ran—the strip—in this wise:

COME-ON CHARLEY'S CHRISTMAS

Below this, near the center of the page, was a double column cut of Charley, and to the right of it was a scare-head which read:

$10,000 IN GOLD TO CHARITY
CARTER TO PLAY SANTA CLAUS
HE WILL GIVE AWAY TOMORROW
ONE THOUSAND GOLD EAGLES
TO ONE THOUSAND NEEDY POOR
LAST MAN GETS $400 EXTRA.

This was twice the size of the usual "Horrible Murder" or "Dreadful Disaster" head the *Scream* was wont to thrill its readers with; but news was scarce, the story was a scoop, and the novelty of Charley's mode of distribution, together with its corelation with the Arrington wager, made an excuse for the display.

The details which followed this prodigal parade of job-type supplied information of the place of distribution, and the how and when of it; and it was also made distinctly clear that Mr. Carter's desire to help along the Christmas festivities "was born of no ulterior motives—" we are quoting Mr. Ball— "but was conceived and determined on in a spirit of large philanthropy, before he had ever laid eyes on the Pittsburg millionaire."

Every evening paper in the city followed the *Scream's* lead—they couldn't ignore it—and the morning papers on the twenty-fourth carried the story, embellished in some instances with interviews with Charley which were as authentic as the Apocrypha itself. For Mr. Carter, be it known, had fled for the night to an obscure hotel when the Central Office of the police department had called him up on the telephone, shortly after the *Scream* came out, and intimated the Commissioner would like a word with him.

He left Mr. Link and Mr. Teeters keeping guard over the gold—some thirty odd

Digitized by Google

pounds of the precious metal stowed away in an Oxford bag. This they were to smuggle into the Allrott Theater by the stage door at six o'clock in the morning, when Charley would meet them. A pair of armed Pinkertons would ride in the limousine as escort to the treasure.

Mr. Drew, in the meantime, had looked up the law and could find nothing against Charley's plan except the ordinance providing against obstruction of the street and traffic. As Charley would not be on the street, but well away from it, it was a moot point whether he could be charged with violating the law.

A man circling the Flatiron building in an air-ship would pack the streets below, but would this make him guilty of a misdemeanor? It was a peg to hang a legal wrangle on should it be brought into court, and pending this it was up to the police. The Christmas spirit was abroad, and interfering with a charity on such a scale as this would not be a popular move.

Perhaps it was this which made the police so abnormally mild on the morning of the twenty-fourth, or perhaps it was something else. At any rate, when at six o'clock Charley's limousine drew up in the side street from which a passage led to the Allrott's stage-door no one questioned Mr. Link when he lugged the Oxford bag into the theater, for no one was there to do it. Four or five policemen were patrolling the street at the Broadway entrance, before the heavy steel portcullis which barred the lobby, and they had their hands full with the crowd which was already gathering—a miserable, shivering host of human derelicts, pouring in from all the wretched dens the city harbored.

And the odd part of it was, these dubious persons at first did not seem anxious to approach too near the theater. They took account of one another, casting up, so it seemed, the number present, and each being politely solicitous to give way to his fellow. They were thinking of the four hundred dollars the last man was to get.

This continued but a short time, however, for by seven o'clock it became a question of which would be first and the devil take the hindermost. Who this final one would be was an arithmetical problem impossible of solution. Broadway was jammed for a block each way from the Allrott. The precinct reserves had been called out long before this, but they could not stem the tide which set in against them. They were too late—or too lax.

Charley, with a shrewd look ahead, had notified his judicatory committee of Goats the day previous to put in an appearance before seven, and the committee watched the crowd from a second-story window, arranged for in advance, across the street from the playhouse. They estimated there were three thousand people in sight when the clock struck seven. At least a fourth of these were spectators, drawn to the spot thus early by curiosity inflamed through reading the newspapers.

The police were in full evidence now. Reserves came up on the run from neighboring precints, and attempts were made to "cut out" a calculated thousand men and women and form a line of them extending around the square in the hope that the others could be dispersed. But the crowd fought this doggedly. They were suspicious; they were not to be dispossessed of the vantage-ground they had acquired. Those massed about the entrance to the Allrott would not budge, and those on the outer edge kept pressing in, trusting desperately to some chance that would land them within the favored circle.

The bluecoats made onslaughts on them with drawn clubs, but somehow there wasn't any punch behind these raids, and the clubs did little damage. Never was a New York crowd so tenderly handled. But it grew, springing up, one could almost fancy, from the earth beneath. At twenty minutes after seven the Goats' committee computed it at five thousand; and by eight o'clock, to anticipate a bit, the crowd had grown so that the committee didn't even try to guess at it.

More reserves arrived, and a detail of mounted officers came swinging up Broadway at a cavalry trot. They charged the throng, and bored a way through the fringe of it; but they got no farther—the horses were thrown back on their haunches squealing in affright. It was like butting against a dam of solid India-rubber, which gave way only to rebound into place again. In fact the people were crammed in so from wall to wall on the block in which the Allrott stood that a battering-ram could not have made head with them. They couldn't move if they would, and they wouldn't move if they could; to make them would

Digitized by Google

mean the actual slaughter of hundreds. To sum the matter up, the police had lost control of the situation by not getting it in hand at the start.

It was about this time that two inspectors burst into the box-office where Charley sat with Mr. Verdant Wise, Mr. Link, Mr. Teeters and the Pinkertons. The inspectors had come around by the stage-door, and they were looking worried.

"Say, Carter," growled one of them, "this ain't going to do. Broadway is blocked from the Battery up, and God knows how far above us. You'll have to call it off."

"Sure," said Charley. "Go ahead and do it."

The hum or rather the roar of the crowd came in to them. It was like the noise of a myriad of locusts settling to the ground.

"Got a weak throat," added Charley. "'Fraid I couldn't make 'em hear me."

His eyes were dancing now.

"Well, what's to be done?" questioned the other man gruffly. "If you lift that gate the lobby will be choked in ten seconds. We can't form a line with this mob. How are you going to get 'em out when you get 'em in?"

"Not going to get them out," said Charley. "Better scheme."

"What is it? Let's have it—quick!"

"All right," assented Charley. "Get a hundred cops. Put forty in the lobby. Line them up from the gate to the door. Make a path for one man at a time past the window. Rest of cops inside the house. Keep everybody in till the cash runs out. Then turn them loose. Simple."

The two inspectors looked at each other.

"Shoot me, Bill, if that won't do it!" barked the man who had spoken first. "But we shan't wait till any eight o'clock, Mr. Carter. You'll begin this show right now—understand—as soon as we bring in the men."

"Suit yourself," said Charley affably. "Same to me."

IT WAS all over by eleven o'clock. The police made the crowd come through on a trot past the ticket-window. Ten-dollar gold-pieces are easy to handle and there was no hitch. The last man didn't get the four hundred extra, though. There was a woman behind him—a thin, pale, tottering young woman who in some miraculous way had found strength to hold up against the frightful crush in the streets. Charley saw her coming just as he sang out to the big lieutenant at the gate to drop it. He pushed a coin to the one-thousandth man, treacherously betraying him, and to the woman he passed out two stacks of golden eagles, twenty in each. She screamed—made feeble reachings for the money—and crumpled up in a senseless heap on the floor.

VI

AT TWELVE o'clock Charley sat in the Dutch Room of The Goats' Club, off in a secluded corner. The house was filled with jubilant members. Charley had been lauded, applauded and toasted to a standstill, and was then called on for a speech. He grinned, and responded at some length—for him. He said:

"Forget it. Fun. All over. Merry Christmas."

He sat now in his corner, tired but serene. Mr. Drew and Mr. Link were with him, and Mr. Teeters, of course. A magnum of champagne stood before them on the table. Mr. Drew had ordered it. Mr. Verdant Wise, who was of the party at first, had left them to circulate among closer friends. He was looking the part his name implied, and he was a well-contented man. If there was any one in New York who didn't know about the Allrott at that hour, Mr. Wise would like to gaze upon the freak.

Extras were being cried on the streets, and each paper roundly roasted the police for "the unparalleled inefficiency displayed in handling the crowd." Even as late as eleven o'clock they had not succeeded in clearing Broadway. It was only after the gate was dropped that the people could be moved. Then the police seemed to wake up of a sudden, and a savage tattoo of locust sticks on stubborn heads made the neighborhood look like a deserted village in half an hour.

The Commissioner, it was rumored, was raving like a madman in his office, and very nearly as helpless. He would have to discipline practically the entire force, if he did anything at all. It was a situation he had never before encountered, nor any of his predecessors so far as the records showed.

But at The Goats' they recked little of the troubles of the "Finest." They were celebrating. The Club's reputation had

Digitized by Google

been enhanced—redeemed might be the better word. The spot-light was playing on the whole caboodle of them, and they posed in happy harmony in its glow.

And Arrington! He had "come through" like the dead-game sport he really was, despite his unpleasant way of asserting it. Charley held his check for seventy thousand dollars, and a hundred other Goats were blessed in aliquot parts of this amount, ranging from a thousand dollars down; for Mr. Arrington, being full of wine most of the time, and smothered in money all of the time, had backed himself against the world. Wherefore the Goats were making merry in the fold.

Mr. Teddy Ball, who had been busy in the writing-room turning off picturesque copy to supplement his telephoned flashes to the *Scream*, came leaping down the stairs. He thrust an envelope into the hands of a waiting boy.

"Scoot!" he ordered.

The boy ran out of the door, jumped into a cab, and went racing off. Mr. Ball then sauntered into the Dutch Room like a man of large and elegant leisure, though in truth he was alert to possible "follow-ups."

"Ha!" vociferated Mr. Teeters as the sporting editor approached. "We did it, Teddy! Pulled it off as easy as peeling potatoes. You owe me a hundred."

"Don't!" begged Mr. Ball, wrinkling his features to express acute mental anguish. "Don't remind me of it, Teet, in my feeble state of health."

"And you owe Come-On a hundred too," persisted Mr. Teeters cruelly.

"Don't mind my sufferings," mourned Mr. Ball. "Go on and rub it in. I'd have been five hundred ahead of the game if it hadn't been for you and Charley. I'm only three hundred as it stands."

Charley grinned.

"Hedged?" he asked.

"Yes. On Monday after you left. A hunch hit me that I was betting on a dead card and I passed the buck to Arrington. Have a look."

He showed a check for five hundred from the prodigal from Pittsburg. Mr. Link winked at Mr. Drew and remarked—

"Faith, and we didn't pick any green persimmons ourselves, did we, judge?"

The lawyer's vest-buttons joggled. They did that way when he was amused.

"I'm satisfied," he admitted. "What has got us guessing, Ball, is Charley's statement. He says he isn't sixty thousand to the good."

Mr. Ball sat down opposite Charley at the table and regarded him earnestly.

"How much to the good are you then, Mr. Charles Arthur Carter?" he desired to know.

"Nothing," Charley answered. "No fun making presents if some other chap pays for them. Not my idea of Christmas."

A look came into the sporting editor's eyes that one man seldom gives another. And when he does it is worth more than minted gold. But he said:

"Confound you for a blithering idiot, what are you going to do with the seventy thousand?"

Charley hesitated a moment. Then he took the Arrington check from his pocket.

"Secret among us five. Not for publication," he stipulated.

"If you say not—no," sighed Teddy Ball, wishing good-by to another scoop.

Charley laid the check face down on the table, wrote two lines on it, and added his signature. He shoved the slip of paper over to the *Scream* man, who glanced at it, whistled, and passed it to Mr. Drew, who passed it to Mr. Link. Neither made a comment. There were too many prick-eared Goats about.

Mr. Link in turn passed the check to Mr. Teeters. That artless person goggled at it and wiggled his mustache.

"Gollamighty!" he squeaked. "Police Pension——"

"Shut up, you ass!" hissed Mr. Ball. "It's a good cause, Charley. And the Lord knows they need it."

Mr. Drew, who had called for a glass for Mr. Ball and filled it, raised his own. He did not stand; it would attract attention to them.

"Mr. Carter!"

The attorney's manner was forensic, and Charley scanned him in surprise.

"Mr. Carter," went on Mr. Drew orotundly, "you are an abandoned spendthrift, sir—a horrible example of free-handed, great-hearted, magnificent munificence, and you will very likely die in the poorhouse. But at the present moment you are—and I defy contradiction—the most to-be-envied man in this city of New York.

"You have, in your—er—simple way, gladdened the hearts of thousands on the eve of the fairest day emblazoned on the

Digitized by Google

Christian calendar. May the—" he caught a twinkle in Charley's eye, and stepped down precipitately from his stilts—"may the deuce take you, sir!" he finished, then added: "I wish you, my dear boy, a Merry Christmas, and—and—oh, hang it—drink, you jackanapes! And all of you!"

They laughed and they drank. Then Mr. Link spoke. It was apparently irrelevant to the immediate proceedings, yet all seemed to understand him. He replaced his glass on the table and observed with an air of intense self-astonishment:

"May the devil fly away with me! That explains a whole lot of things!"

"Sure," said Charley.

The next adventure of *Come-On Charley* will appear complete in the February issue.

Owing to exigencies of make-up, the next *Miss Dem.* story, "Spangles and Soapsuds," is postponed to the next issue.

SEA-FEVER

By Mary Carolyn Davies

OH, THE sun is striking down at my heart within the town,
And the long streets are leering at my pain;
Will these bells and whistles cease, is there anywhere there's peace?
Shall I ever know the wind and spray again?
Give me a boat again, set me out afloat again,
Sail or keel, oar or wheel, any, anything to feel
Salt and spray upon my face, where, lips wet with wind, I race,
Race the clouds and stars again, far from home and haunt of men;
For the wind and waterways have stamped me with their seal!

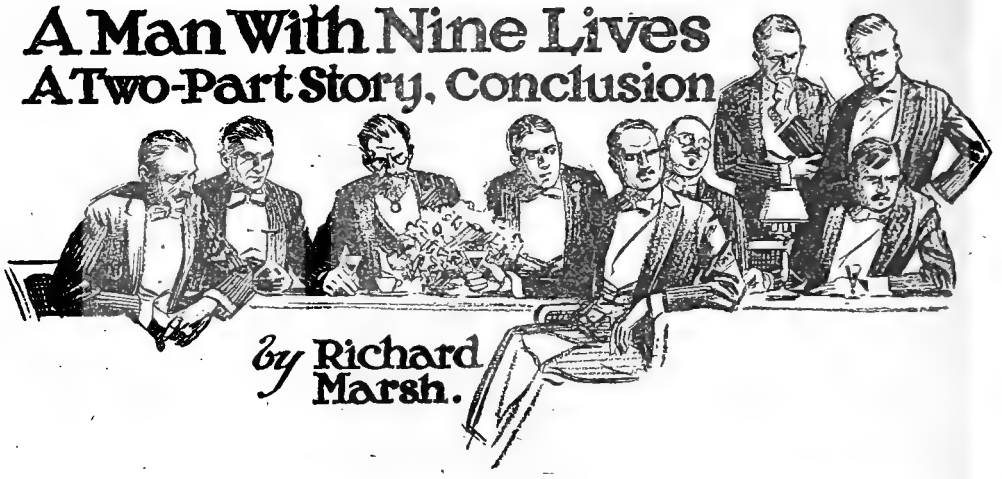
Oh, the clamor of the town molds me, holds me grimly down,
And the heat winds its hands about my throat.
But there still is sea somewhere, mist and sea-fog in the air,
There are little frail and fairy craft afloat.
Give me an oar again, set me out from shore again,
Dark or day, calm or spray, any, anywhere you say;
Let me feel again the might of the water, let me fight
Will to will, strength to strength, hate to hatred, till at length
Wind and water welcome me, and know me strong as they!

There is dust and level heat on the black and moving street,
And the long night will just repeat the day;
But I'm dreaming of the sea, sail and sea-gull white and free;
And I want to drift and listen where they play.
Give me a boat again, set me out afloat again,
Sail a-shine, white and fine, clouds like whiter sails in line,
Wave and furrow, spray and foam, this is home and home and home!
This is gladness, this is power, this my one triumphant hour!
Leagues of sky, and leagues of sea, and all of it is mine!

Digitized by Google

A Man With Nine Lives

A Two-Part Story, Conclusion



by Richard Marsh.

SYNOPSIS:—Martin Adair, a London vagabond, is befriended by an eccentric money-lender, Jerningham Creed. The old man is murdered in his Mitre Court office and Adair finds himself sole heir. He at once takes over Creed's business, for which he has a hearty dislike, and plans to close the doors permanently. While taking inventory he discovers a vast collection of jewels, among which is his mother's brooch. Also, he finds that a secret stairway leads below to the deserted offices of Latralle, Olango & Co., where, concealed in a desk, he finds a camera which photographs any one entering the room.

A yellow man attempts to rob Adair's office, then escapes. Next comes Mr. Outerbridge, representing a syndicate to which he claims Creed owed a large sum for a parcel, delivered just before the murder. He threatens Adair should he refuse payment. A second attempt at robbery follows during their conversation—this time a yellow hand over the window-sill. Adair scents a plot and kicks Outerbridge from his office.

In search of quiet lodgings, Adair takes a suite in the Dovecote. He receives a shock when his landlady, Miss Winifred Dennis, appears. He swears he has seen this attractive young woman before! He is further perplexed when from day to day she informs him that he is not wanted in the house. Thinking that he has the solution to her attitude when he learns that former agents of Creed threaten to dispossess her for nonpayment of an old debt, and also that the girl depends upon his rent to support an invalid mother, Adair settles the account. But Miss Dennis redoubles her efforts to drive him out. Returning home late one night Adair is knocked down at his gate by a mysterious visitor of Miss Dennis. Next morning she dumfounds him by wearing his mother's brooch, and by refusing flatly to give any information concerning it.

Meanwhile Adair is induced by Mr. Bishop Guy, whose wife is intimate with Miss Dennis, to finance a company for the production of his marvelous discovery, New Silk.

Anxious to know the value of his jewelry, Adair shows the largest gem to John Harper, a jewel expert. He learns that it is the famous Kaufmann Diamond, stolen from an Indian raja while in London some years before. Adair needs a friend to help him fight the sinister forces against him. He appeals to Harper.

CHAPTER XIV

JOHN HARPER

"YOU SEEM comfortable in here." They were in Mr. Harper's sitting-room. Adair was glancing around it. "This doesn't seem to be the sort of apartment to which one is generally introduced when one asks for a private sitting-room in an hotel."

"It isn't. I live here when I'm in town, so I keep on this little suite, which is pretty full of my own belongings—which makes a difference. Is that chair all right?" The visitor was settling himself in a big leather armchair. "Then that's all right; and since you're all right I don't want to hurry you, but I'm rather keen to hear your story. I'm conscious all the while that you've got the Kaufmann Diamond in your waistcoat pocket, and I'm all over curiosity as to how it got there."

Adair looked up from the fresh cigar which he had lighted.

"Did you ever hear of a man named Creed?"

One had a feeling that the question rather took Mr. Harper by surprise. He answered the question with another.

"What Creed was that?"

"Jerningham Creed. He had chambers

Digitized by Google

in Mitre Court before his death."

"What about him?"

"He was murdered not long ago; you probably heard of it."

"It's very possible; one does hear of a good many people being murdered."

"He was an old man, probably eighty years of age. He lived all alone in his chambers, which consisted of five rooms—his own office, a little room which was used as his clerk's office, his dining-room, his bedroom and a good sized sort of den which he used as a lumber-room."

"You seem to have an intimate acquaintance with his chambers."

"I have. He was found one Wednesday morning lying on the floor of his own office. He was in his nightshirt. When he was first found he had been dead some hours. The theory was that in the middle of the night he had heard some one moving about his office, that he got out of bed to see who was there, and that some one killed him. He had been struck on the head with so much force that the blow had broken not only his head, but also his neck."

Mr. Adair, pausing, leaned back in his seat and for some seconds smoked his cigar in silence. Mr. Harper watched his visitor silently. Presently Adair went on:

"That's as far as the police, up to the present moment, have got. They have not discovered the criminal, or any trace of him. I was Jerningham Creed's clerk, the only one he had; he had other assistants of a kind, plenty of them, but they weren't clerks. Although he sometimes spoke of me as his junior clerk, I was the only one he had. He made me his heir."

Another pause; then he added—

"I've a sort of fancy, Harper, that you knew this before I told you."

Silence. Not a muscle of Mr. Harper's face moved; yet something looked out of his eyes which suggested that he was keeping himself tightly in hand.

"You are both right and wrong. I knew something of Creed; I heard of his death. I was told that he had left all his money to a clerk, but until this moment I had no notion that the name of that clerk was Martin Adair. I cannot picture you as a clerk."

"You would if you had seen me then—living on something over a pound a week, with my trousers up to my knees."

"How came you to be in such a plight."

"That's a long story; I don't propose to go into it now. Why Creed made me his heir I have not the faintest notion."

"When I heard that Creed had left his money to his clerk I said to myself that that clerk, being a certain sort of man, had made it clear to him that it was the only thing he could do."

"You're in error. I was the clerk, and until Mr. Foster asked me to call on him at his office, and there made me acquainted with the contents of Mr. Creed's will, I had not the faintest idea that he had left me a penny. Why he did is beyond me."

"He had his reasons."

"How do you know?"

"I admit this much. I knew enough of Creed to be aware that he never did a thing in his life without having what appeared to him to be a sound reason. He had his own reasons for making you his heir; I'm prepared to bet on it."

"I have not been able to find a reason. Over and over again I have asked myself what it could have been. I have looked for it among his papers, but I have never found it."

"You will; and when you do it's quite likely that you won't be altogether pleased. Creed probably didn't leave you what he did because he wished to do you a good turn. He possibly had some malicious motive of his own—he was that sort of man."

"You seem to have known Jerningham Creed tolerably well. I thought you did."

There was an interval of silence.

There was a new dryness in Mr. Harper's tone when he spoke again.

"What made you think that? Was it mere surmise?"

"Not altogether; I'll tell you presently what my reasons were. I had some."

"It appears to me, Mr. Adair, that you and I have been keeping dark from each other."

"If that is so, then I believe it to be without intention on either side. You know that Creed was ostensibly a money-lender."

"So I have understood; I thought it was something more than pretense."

"It was; he did a very large business as a usurer. He had branches everywhere. Persons who were really his agents acted for him in all parts of England. But he was something besides a usurer. Don't

Digitized by Google

you know what that something was, Mr. Harper?"

"Why are you looking at me in that very significant way?"

"I've not yet been able clearly to understand the situation, but it appears to me that he must have been a dealer in stolen valuables, especially jewels, on an amazingly large scale. Didn't you know that? You told me downstairs that whispers sometimes reached you; did no whisper ever reach you to that effect?"

"You're still looking at me as if you intended your glances to be full of meaning, Mr. Adair. Have you any particular cause to associate me with that unholy knowledge?"

"Did you ever hear of a firm styled Latraille, Olgano & Co.?"

"You look me very straight in the face. Out with it, my dear man; what are you implying?"

ADAIR took a letter-case out of his pocket and from the case drew something which he handed to Mr. Harper.

"Have you ever seen the original of that? Isn't that your portrait?"

Before looking at what the other man had given him Mr. Harper very steadily eyed the man in front of him. Then he transferred his glance to what he was holding in his fingers.

"This does seem to be my portrait. It's not a very good one; in fact, it's a very bad one; but I shouldn't be surprised to learn that it was supposed to be me.

"You're a very mysterious person, you know, Adair. I had no idea what a piece of mystery I was in for when I asked you here to dine. The more I look at this product of the photographer's art, the more it puzzles me; it more than smells of the amateur—it reeks of it. What I'm asking myself is, when and where did I pose for the artist who has used me so cruelly? May I ask where you got this portrait?"

"It was taken in the office of Messrs. Latraille, Olgano & Co."

"What!"

This time Mr. Harper seemed genuinely stirred; he took his cigar from between his lips and opened his eyes.

"That's why I asked if you knew a firm styled Latraille, Olgano and Company—because, as I say, that portrait was taken in their office."

"You're getting more and more mysterious, Mr. Adair. There's something at the back of all this. May I ask you to speak plainly and tell me what you mean?"

"Will you first tell me if you are acquainted with the firm of Latraille, Olgano & Co.?"

"How can I tell off-hand if, among the hundreds of firms with whom in my time I have done business, I was ever what you call acquainted with the people you name? I may once have visited their office."

"You have visited it more than once; you have visited it at least twice. Because that portrait is also yours."

Taking something else from his letter-case, the visitor passed it to his host. Mr. Harper just glanced at it, then rose to his feet.

"Mr. Adair, I'm beginning to understand why you were of opinion that the smoking-lounge was rather a public place for the sort of conversation you had in mind. You said you'd been making inquiries about me, but you did not say to what length those inquiries had gone; your knowledge of me seems to be of a singular kind.

"It doesn't seem to me to be quite fair, because I know nothing about you. Since both these things which you call portraits are clearly meant to represent me, and I stood for neither, perhaps you'll explain how they came to be taken."

"The difficulty is that I can't, unless you admit your acquaintance with the office of Messrs. Latraille, Olgano & Co."

"Well—if I do?"

"You have a picture of it in your mind's eye?"

"I might. So far as I recollect it was very much like any other office."

"It was—in appearance. Do you remember an old writing-table which stood in the center of the room?"

"I believe I do. I'm not quite certain, but—well, there was sure to be a writing-table. What would an office of that sort be without one?"

"In that writing-table there was a camera concealed."

"How could that be? How could there be a camera in a writing-table?"

"One of these days I may be able to show you. You may take it from me that there

Digitized by Google

was. The presumption is that Messrs. Latraille, Olgano & Co. had some very curious customers. For reasons of their own they were anxious to have mementos of their visits, or at least of some of them. When they expected such a visit they set the camera in a particular way, and the visitor, passing from the door toward the table, set it in motion; and without his having the least idea of anything of the kind, his photograph was taken."

"And you have come across these photographs? I am beginning to see daylight?"

"I haven't exactly come across the photographs, but I've come across the camera. It contained the longest film I ever saw; long enough for a cinematographic picture. I developed it; I printed from the result, and found myself possessed of quite a gallery of portraits. Those which you are holding are two of them. They are not very good, but one can see that they represent you."

"Still I don't understand. You say these photographs were taken in the office of Messrs. Latraille, Olgano & Co. What were you doing there?"

"Who do you suppose was Latraille, Olgano & Co? Don't you know?"

"The only member of the firm I ever saw was Latraille. He was a thin, cadaverous looking party with a thick mop of red hair, a pair of the bushiest eyebrows I ever saw, and a ridiculous mustache. I always wondered what nationality he was; he seemed to speak all languages equally well, except English—his English was a little difficult to follow. I did my business with him in French—he spoke it fluently; but I had a notion that in spite of his flaming head he was an Armenian Greek."

"No, he wasn't. He was English."

"How do you know? I tell you he spoke English as if the mere effort gave him lockjaw. What do you mean by 'he wasn't'? Is the man dead? When did he die, and how? No intimation reached me."

"He was murdered."

"The deuce he was! There seems to be an epidemic of murder in that neighborhood."

"I found his hair, eyebrows and mustache in a little box in his bedroom. I'll show them you some day. I propose to show you a good many things, Harper, and I think you'll find some of them quite interesting."

"Adair, are you pulling my leg? What do you mean, too, by you found his hair, eyebrows and mustache? You speak as if they were detachable."

"That's precisely it—they were. I've a strong suspicion that the man you knew as Latraille, the sole representative of Latraille, Olgano & Co., was Jerningham Creed."

"It's not possible! You have Jerningham Creed on the brain. Latraille was a foreigner. Besides—Jehoshaphat! If you should be right! That might explain!"

"I am right—what does it explain?"

"It explains——"

Mr. Harper stopped; for so self-possessed a gentleman he seemed to be a trifle confused. Then he went on:

"It might explain a good many things. I'll come to that presently. I see, Adair, you have something on the tip of your tongue. Out with it!"

"If for any reason, Harper, you don't wish to answer the question I am going to put to you, don't. You may have a hundred good reasons for not wishing to make a confidant of me. I have no desire to be intrusive."

Mr. Adair paused. Mr. Harper regarded him with a shadow of a smile playing about his tightly closed lips. It was he who went on:

"You were about to ask me what was I doing in Latraille's office?" The other nodded. "You are suggesting that Creed upstairs and Latraille below were one and the same person, and were both dealers in stolen goods. I'm not commenting on your suggestion; you may be right, or you may be wrong. I can only assure you that consciously I never trafficked in property of the kind.

"I went to Latraille to buy jewels in the ordinary way of business. He used occasionally to write to me to say that he had a small parcel of rubies, emeralds, diamonds—it might be one, it might be the other, it might be stones of any kind—to offer; he would be glad to show them to me when I happened to be in town; if I would write before I came he would make an appointment; he saw customers only by appointment. I have all his letters. I remember that sentence was in all of them—that he saw customers only by appointment. I'd make an appointment; I'd call; he'd show me his parcel; I bought them, or I didn't."

Digitized by Google

"Generally you bought them."

Harper regarded the speaker with inquiring eyes. He seemed to be reflecting.

"I believe I did. But how do you know?"

"When you pay me a visit in Mitre Court I will lay my reasons for knowing that, and certain other facts, before you; I think you will find them conclusive. I think, also, that as a rule he sold them to you a little under the market price."

"I admit that I certainly found no desire on his part to overcharge me. But perhaps you wouldn't mind telling me now, instead of later on, how you come to know these things. It seems to me, Adair, that you're not quite playing a fair game. You appear to be in possession of—I don't know what facts, which you may be construing to my disadvantage."

"Creed, figuring as Latraille, kept a sort of day-book. For instance there was an entry, 'four rubies;' then he gives a reference to another volume. Then he states what he calls their value—say one hundred pounds; then that he offered them to J. H. for eighty, that you would give only sixty, at which price he sold them.

"I found, in a safe to which no one could have access but himself, certain volumes which contained the most remarkable information. There is one in which he gives particulars of the initials which are contained in the day-book of which I have just been telling you. For instance, he explains that J. H. stands for John Harper. Then he gives a short biography of John Harper, with his address or adresses, notes on his character, and financial position."

"This is pleasant hearing, Adair. I should very much like to see what that volume says about me."

"Nothing very much to your disadvantage, Harper; coming from old Creed, I should say that his comments on you amount to a first-rate testimonial. You shall see them for yourself before very long.

"Then there's another volume in which he explains the references, say, to the 'four rubies.' You find a sort of history of those four rubies under their reference number—who they belonged to; whose hands they passed into, and how; how they came to him, and sometimes other extremely interesting details. Those two books, if they fell into certain hands, would be worth—untold money."

"And I suppose if it were known that you had them your life wouldn't be worth twenty-four hours' purchase."

"I'm not so sure. Attempts have been made on it already. I pass my days and nights in an atmosphere which reeks of danger; that's no exaggeration, it's a simple statement of a plain fact. But I'm inclined to think that he spoke truth who said that threatened men live long."

"Don't you make any mistake about that. If the fiat has gone out from certain quarters that A. B. is to die, we'll say within seven days, within seven days A. B. will be dead—as surely as I am standing here."

"Then we'll hope, if I'm A. B., that the fiat has not gone forth. Harper, I want you to come to Mitre Court—not for a few hours on one occasion only, but I want you in a sense to camp out with me there. I want to go with you through all the possessions of the late Mr. Jerningham Creed; then I want you to advise me. Certain articles—as, for instance, the Kaufmann Diamond—are stolen property beyond the shadow of a doubt."

"You knew that it was the Kaufmann Diamond, and you knew its history."

"I did. I wanted to find out what you knew. I'm seeking an expert, Harper, a man who knows—a strong man. I'm asking you to come with me into the danger zone."

"I shouldn't mind that in the least; I should rather like it."

There was something in the expression on the speaker's face which was more eloquent than this words. He looked every inch a fighting man.

"When you and I have grasped the true inwardness of old Creed's belongings, as I told you, I shall want your advice. Certain things will have to be restored to their owners—you'll agree with me on that point. They shall be restored. About certain others there are doubts of various kinds. Tell me what you think ought to be done with them; it shall be done. After justice has been pushed even to the verge of quixotism, I believe that there will still be a residue—a large one. Jerningham Creed was not a thief only."

THE two men had been standing facing each other. When Adair had finished his sentence he moved so that his face was turned from the other. He trifled with an ornament which was on the mantel-shelf.

Digitized by Google

"One of these days I may tell you something about myself; now I propose to tell you only this. I want a sum—a large sum—of money to right a wrong; until that wrong is righted I shall be seeing bogies. Out of the honest residue of old Creed's fortune I think there will be enough to enable me to right that wrong and to get rid of the bogies; and I fancy there will still be something left for me. What do you say—will you come with me to Mitre Court? I will repay you for your services in any way you like."

"My dear Adair, I know nothing about you, but you are each moment becoming to me a more interesting problem. But my instinct tells me—it has told me all along—that you are a man I can trust. I don't know what you know about me, or what is in old Creed's biographical note; I won't pretend that I'm a simple minded innocent—few men in my trade are. I have sometimes bought in the best market—perhaps Creed says so; but I gather from what you've just been saying that your instinct tells you that you can trust me. You can."

"My good man, I've not the slightest doubt of it. You're the sort of man I should like to have with me in a fight."

"And I like fighting. You can make me no more tempting offer than you have just done. I know nothing I should love better than to go through old Creed's treasure-chests, his note-books, papers, portrait-gallery—as you put it, all his belongings—with you. No more alluring prospect could be presented to the eye of my imagination.

"As for paying me for my services—talk sense. I'll camp out with you in Mitre Court, and I'll be glad to do it because, unless I'm very much in error, in camping out with you I shall have the time of my life."

When, later, the two men had bidden each other good night, and the host had seen his guest leave the hotel, in less than a minute, before John Harper had had time to return to the lounge, Martin Adair reappeared. Mr. Harper looked round at the sound of his voice.

"Hullo!" he exclaimed. "What's up? Have you forgotten anything?"

Adair went close up to him, speaking a little under his breath.

"Yes—I've forgotten this."

Adair held out a small leather case; the other glanced down at it.

"Why," he asked, "what's that?"

"It's the Kaufmann Diamond. I want you to take charge of it for the night. There's a gentleman outside whose face I fancy I've seen before. I dare say some friends of his are not very far away. Possibly adventures are in store for me on my homeward road.

"I don't mind that in the least—they'd be a pleasant wind-up to the evening; but in case of misadventure I should like to feel that the Kaufmann Diamond was in safe keeping. They would so like to find it in my pocket, and I would so like to disappoint them."

"I'll come with you, Adair, at least a part of the way; I also have a taste for adventure."

"You'll do nothing of the kind; you'll stay where you are, and you'll take charge of the Kaufmann Diamond. Good night."

Before John Harper could stop him the other had gone—he had left behind him the little leather case. Harper snapped the case open.

"The Kaufmann Diamond is inside!"

The words implied a doubt; he smiled as the stone gleamed up at him. Then, going to the great door of the hotel, he looked down the street. He saw Martin Adair's tall figure striding along. Harper spoke to the night watchman, who had come out on to the step.

"Have you seen any queer-looking customers hanging about just lately?"

"It depends what you call queer-looking customers." The watchman's tone was gruff. "I saw a Chinaman about ten minutes ago. He was standing on the step, looking through the door into the hall. He made off when I went to ask him what he wanted."

"You're sure he was a Chinaman?"

"I didn't get a very good view of him, but from what I did get he looked as if he was a Chinaman, even if he wasn't."

"Where did he go to?"

"That's what I wondered. When I got into the street he had vanished—I couldn't see him anywhere."

CHAPTER XV

HER MOTHER

ONE afternoon Mrs. Bishop Guy called at the Dovecote. She observed to Miss Dennis, who admitted her—

"I suppose you're in."

Digitized by Google

The girl told her with rather a watery smile that she was, whereupon the visitor assumed an air of severity.

"Then you ought not to be. I do not wish, Winifred Dennis, to comment upon your behavior, because you're incorrigible; but you look as if you hadn't been out for months."

"I have so little time to go out," the young lady explained.

"Stuff and nonsense! I know better." The little lady's manner was quite bellicose. "When I was your lodger I used to make you go out, but of course Mr. Adair, being mere man, is helpless. You take advantage of his helplessness to bully him."

"Ella!" Miss Dennis flushed slightly. "What ridiculous things you say! You little know Mr. Adair if you think that any one could bully him—as if I should want to, if any one could!" The girl checked her visitor as she was turning the handle of a door. "That's Mr. Adair's sitting-room; you can't go in there."

"I can, and I shall. I've come to talk about Mr. Adair—to say nothing of this having been my sitting-room not so very long ago. If he comes and finds us here I shall tell him that I came to see him, and you'll see how flattered he'll be. Which is his own particular armchair? I suppose this is. I shall sit in it." The lady established herself in the largest armchair which the room contained. "Well, my dear, has your treatment of your lodger improved? Poor, wretched man!"

"Ella, that is Mr. Adair's armchair; I don't think you ought to sit in it, if you will come into his room—really."

"Don't you? Then I shall! I don't know if you're aware, my love, that I now regard Martin Adair almost as if he were a sort of relation of mine."

"Since I happen to know that he can not possibly be anything of the kind I won't pretend to understand. I don't know if you mean to be funny, but you're often absurd."

"That's a nice way to speak to me, considering that you haven't seen me since I don't know when."

The air of offended dignity with which Mrs. Bishop Guy strove to regard Miss Dennis was belied by the twinkle which was in her eyes. Miss Dennis's manner was inclined to be a trifle curt.

"I'm very glad to see you, Ella, as you know perfectly well; but I do think you might be a little careful about what you say, at least. For instance, what do you mean by saying that you look upon Mr. Adair as if he were a sort of relation?"

"I shall always feel that my husband's partner is a sort of relation."

"Your husband's partner! Ella, what are you talking about?"

"Don't you know that Mr. Martin Adair is now part proprietor of the New Silk, and the Lock Fastener? If he has not told you so much it is because he's so much afraid of you that he dare tell you nothing."

The visitor was taking her ease in the big armchair; the girl remained standing. She drew herself a little straighter.

"Ella, may I ask you not to joke about things of that sort? Mr. Adair is not afraid of me; I doubt if he's afraid of anything in this world. I'd rather you didn't pretend he was. Please, would you mind telling me if you are serious when you say he's your husband's partner?"

"I shouldn't be one whit less serious if you were to sit down; it's not good manners to stand there glowering at me." Miss Dennis placed herself on the seat which was nearest. "That's right; take the most uncomfortable chair in the room; tacitly reproach me with choosing the best."

"Would you mind telling me—is Mr. Adair Mr. Bishop Guy's partner?"

"He is—he's the head of the firm. He opened an account in the name of the firm for ten thousand pounds some days ago; he's going to pay in further sums as required. In less than no time the New Silk and the Lock Fastener will be on the market—they will come as a boon to millions."

Miss Dennis was silent, seeming not altogether at her ease; a spot of red flushed on either cheek. There was a slight quaver in her voice when she spoke.

"I'm not quite sure that I like what you've told me, Ella."

"Pray why? What is there about my statement of a plain fact which you dislike?"

"You introduced yourself to Mr. Adair, you know."

"I did. Well, what then?"

"I don't want to seem nasty, but was it your intention, before you introduced yourself to him, to try and persuade him to put money into your husband's inventions?"

"Your question sounds nasty, my pet, even if it isn't meant to be; but I don't

Digitized by Google

mind telling you that it wasn't. I wanted to find out what sort of person he was; that's why I introduced myself to him. It was quite a discovery to me to find that he had so much money to put into anything. But I may inform you, for your own personal satisfaction, that the matter has been gone into most thoroughly, and the result has convinced him that he is embarking on a most excellent investment."

Miss Dennis did not receive this bold assertion with such a show of enthusiasm as her friend might have desired.

"I hope he is," was all she said.

There was an interval of silence. Miss Dennis did not look as if she were in the sweetest of tempers; Mrs. Bishop Guy was smilingly bland. She said presently, with a little air of malice—

"My dear, you are full of charm; but—why are you such a pig?"

"Does that question need answering?"

Mrs. Bishop Guy ignored the sarcasm which was in the speaker's tone.

"It needs it very much, my dear; the pity is that you don't seem to know it. Martin Adair is one of the nicest men I ever met."

"He would be, if he put his money in your husband's inventions."

"He is in the most complete sense of the word what I understand as a gentleman. The purpose of his first visit to Redcliffe Mansions was to tell me what a high opinion he had of you."

"It was very good of him; but was it absolutely necessary?"

"What's your objection to the man?"

"I don't know that I have any."

"You must have."

"Why must I?"

"Or you would not treat him as you do."

"How do I treat him? He's our lodger; in what respect don't I treat him as if he were my lodger?"

"The man wants to be comfortable."

"Isn't he comfortable? If he isn't, why doesn't he leave?"

"He wants to arrange with you to have the establishment put on a different footing; this establishment, I mean. He wants to have a proper staff of servants kept—to have the house what a gentleman's house ought to be. He's willing to find the money for this. Why you should object I can't even guess; unless it is because, as I said, you are such a pig."

"I think I am beginning to see daylight. Ella, has Mr. Adair commissioned you to come here and tell me this?"

"He daren't tell you himself because he's afraid. What has the man ever done to you that you should take pleasure in reducing him to such a state of imbecility?'

Miss Dennis remained portentously silent, as if for some cause she was afraid of losing her self-control. When she did speak there was again a slight tremor in her tone.

"I am obliged to you, Ella, for having done Mr. Adair's errand so well; he ought to be obliged to you also. Do you mind changing the subject? How is Mr. Bishop Guy?"

Instead of replying to this inquiry, out of the depths of her armchair the visitor regarded her friend with that odd little twinkle in her eyes. Then she said with an air of finality—

"Winnie, you are a pig."

"You shan't talk to me like that; you shall not!"

"But if you are a pig?"

"Ella, will you be so good as to get it into your head that I will not allow you, or any one, to interfere with my private affairs. I understand them and you don't. Certainly where Mr. Adair is concerned——"

"YES? What about Mr. Adair?"

At that rather inopportune moment, without any sort of warning, the door gently opened, and the owner of that name stood looking into the room. It was not easy to decide which was the more confused—the ladies or the gentleman. He began to apologize.

"You must really forgive me for coming in like this, but I had no idea that my room was being so honored. How are you, Mrs. Bishop Guy? Pray don't trouble to get out of that chair in order to shake hands; it is rather an awkward size."

The lady seemed to be trying to divest herself of any appearance of embarrassment.

"It's my fault for sitting in your room. Winnie didn't want to come—I made her."

"I'm glad you did. Now that you are here, won't you and Miss Dennis have tea with me?"

Mrs. Bishop Guy was withdrawing herself, not very gracefully, from the big armchair.

"I'm afraid I can't. My husband expects to find me when he comes home, and

Digitized by Google

if he does not——" The unfinished sentence was apparently meant to be significant. "I should love to accept your invitation—I'm so sorry that I can't; but I have no doubt that Winnie will, and, as she's in the house, you can make her."

The lady would not be persuaded to stay. When her friend had seen her off the premises, Mr. Adair called from his room.

"Miss Dennis!" The girl appeared in the doorway. "You heard what Mrs. Bishop Guy said. Won't you have tea with me? I should feel so honored."

"Thank you, Mr. Adair; you are very good, but I'd rather not."

The girl was about to withdraw. He checked her.

"One moment, Miss Dennis, if you please. What were you saying about me when I came into the room?"

The girl flushed.

"I don't think that's a fair question."

"Perhaps not. I wish to say something to you, Miss Dennis—which I intend to say." There was something in his tone which caused the girl to seem startled. "To begin with—are you going to engage a cook, or am I?" She echoed his words.

"A cook! Mr. Adair, what do you mean?"

"I mean this, Miss Dennis. I intend, in a sense, to be the master of the Dovecote. I'm not going to allow you to live the life you are living any longer. There's going to be a change in the domestic arrangement. By way of inaugurating that change, will you be so good as to introduce me to your mother."

The girl was staring wide-eyed at the speaker.

"Mr. Adair, I—I can't."

"And why can't you? I know Mrs. Dennis is an invalid, but I understand she's not in a state in which her introduction to me would make her worse. Would it do her harm if she made my acquaintance?"

"I—I don't know that it would do her harm." The girl stammered; clearly she was disconcerted by this new phase in the lodger's bearing. Hitherto he had always held himself humbly in her sight; now he was showing a sudden disposition to dominate. "Mr. Adair, my mother is paralyzed. I do not think that she'd be conscious of your presence even if I introduced you to her. What good would be gained?"

"I should prefer to know her."

Miss Dennis hesitated; then came to a sudden resolve.

"If you prefer to know her, you shall. Wait one moment. I'll be back in a moment to take you to her."

The girl went, then presently returned. In her bearing also there was something new; she looked at him with shining eyes.

"Mr. Adair, I ought to tell you that my mother lives in one room. She has not left her bed for some years, nor spoken a word, nor moved a finger; I am not even sure that she recognizes me. She is just alive and that is all. I share her room. I live in it, and eat in it, and sleep in it. Now that I have told you, will you come and be introduced to my mother?"

"Nothing, Miss Dennis, could give me greater pleasure."

The girl led the way to a room at the back of the house, a good-sized apartment, not uncomfortable, though it contained two beds and the furniture of a sitting-room besides. In one corner was one of those numerous kinds of bedsteads which nowadays are made for the incurable. Miss Dennis led him straight to it.

"Mr. Adair, this is my mother. Mother, this is Mr. Adair, our lodger, to whom we are indebted in very many ways."

The girl spoke with a strange sort of heat; Adair did not know what to make of her. On the bedstead by which he was standing a form was outlined under the clothes; a strange face was turned up toward him. Whether it belonged to a man or a woman it would not have been easy for a stranger to determine.

It was the face of one who, though still living, was already worse than dead. Obviously it would have been absurd to have attempted to address its owner; to have done so would have been as if he mocked. He stood silent, conscious of a sudden queer something which was almost shame. The girl spoke again.

"Now you know my mother, and my mother knows you. Are you satisfied, Mr. Adair?"

"If you will come back with me to the sitting-room I will tell you, Miss Dennis. I feel that here I am an intruder."

"Here I am not an intruder; in this room I live and move and have my being. I would rather not return to your room, nor is there anything which you can have to say to me that I wish to hear."

Digitized by Google

"You'll have to hear me all the same, Miss Dennis. My position in this house gives me a right to say what I have to say; and you will have to hear; that is your plain and simple duty. Permit me to open the door for you."

She bit her lips. Her cheeks were flushed. Then she went through the open door and returned with him to his sitting-room.

CHAPTER XVI

VISITORS

WHEN they were back in the sitting-room the gentleman advanced a chair toward the lady.

"Sit down," he said.

If he was curt, the lady was not less so.

"Thank you, I'd rather stand."

"And I would rather you sat." He looked at her—and she sat. He moved to the other side of the room. "As I told you just now, Miss Dennis, I wish to come to some understanding with you on the subject of what I will call the domestic arrangements."

"I'm sorry to hear they're not to your taste, Mr. Adair."

"You have just done me the honor to introduce me to your mother, Miss Dennis."

"Then doesn't that make it clear to you why the arrangements are what they are?"

Although she spoke so quietly, passion seemed to ring in the girl's voice.

"On the contrary, it is plainer to me than ever how essential it is that the domestic arrangements should be changed."

"You forget, Mr. Adair, that you are speaking of my mother's house. If you are not comfortable you have only to go."

"I am comfortable, and I do not propose to go; but I do intend that things shall be altered. In the first place, I wish you to keep a cook."

"You wish me! Until this moment I had no idea that you found my attempts at cooking so little to your taste."

"I do not delude myself, for a moment, with any notion that the average cooks can perform the miracles you have done. I have never tasted more exquisitely prepared food than you have set before me. But all the same I do not intend that you shall do the cooking for me any longer. I wish you to engage a common cook."

"You appear to have gone with your grievances to Mrs. Bishop Guy; but I do not think it was necessary that you should have sent her here to issue, on your behalf, the command which it is quite clear you could give yourself—as you are doing."

"I went to Mrs. Bishop Guy because I dare not go to you; that's frank, Miss Dennis."

"I have heard that already, from her. She could be as frank as you are—being, I suppose, instructed by you. She told me that I bullied you. Did you instruct her to tell me that?"

The gentleman smiled, but the lady looked very far from smiling.

"I did not even request her to say anything like that, Miss Dennis; but the fact remains that I have wished to go with you into this matter over and over again, but I've never dared. Whenever I began, you—I can't help saying you choked me off."

"And I mean to—as you put it—choke you off now."

"Pardon me, but now I have brought myself to the sticking point I don't mean to be choked off."

The girl had risen.

"Will you kindly resume your seat, Miss Dennis? But whether you do or do not you are going to listen to what I have to say. You are one of the most unreasonable persons I ever met; you have no notion what I have suffered on your account."

"Suffered on my account? You? What have you suffered?"

"All sorts of things in all kinds of ways. I have more money than I know what to do with. I want to be comfortable; I want those about me to be comfortable. As matters have stood we have neither of us been comfortable. It is positive pain to me to see you work as you have been doing; I have not slept at nights because of the shame I felt at the thought of your being my servant—you, a lady! A delicate, refined, well-bred, highly educated girl! And you go on your knees to scrub floors for me. I'd far rather go on my knees to scrub floors for you, and that's a solid fact.

"And you wait on me at table, hand and foot; you prepare my food; you cook it and serve it; you wash my plates and dishes—there is no menial task which you don't perform for me. Miss Dennis, won't you listen to reason? You wish to let lodgings; well, I'm prepared to take them, only I don't want to continue to suffer as I have.

Digitized by Google

Why won't you have a proper staff of servants? I'm prepared to pay for them.

"I'm prepared to become your paying guest, and to pay you any reasonable sum you like—five, six, seven hundred a year—on the condition that you provide the proper staff of servants. Why should you object to my having what I want if you don't lose by it?"

"I see your point of view—why should I?"

While the gentleman had been indulging in such a flow of language, the girl had stood listening with the inscrutable something on her face, and in her eyes, which affected more than any words could have done. He did his best to struggle against the feeling with which her attitude filled him, that he was behaving to her like a brute.

"If you do see my point of view, what objection have you to what I propose?"

"I do not know that at this moment I have any objections to make; only—you see, Mr. Adair, you do not understand."

"What don't I understand? I will do my best to understand anything if you will give me the chance."

"I dare say; but I don't propose to give you the chance. You talk about your suffering. It's very good of you to suffer when you think of my scrubbing the floors, and cooking the meals, but you do not suffer so much as I do from what I am beginning to regard as your persistent attempts to force yourself into matters which to me are secret and sacred, and which I mean to keep inviolate. I would sooner lose you as a lodger than take you into my confidence."

"What should you do if you did? Take another? How would you be better off if you did, Miss Dennis?"

"I can not tell you what I should do; but I will tell you this—I have kept you as a lodger only because I do not wish my mother to be turned out into the street. So long as she lives I must be always at her side, so I let lodgings. When she dies I will let lodgings no longer; I will try some other way of earning a living. I am conscious of what I owe you, and there could not be a better lodger than you are; but—one can pay too dearly even for the best. It seems to me that that is what you're trying to make me do.

"Am I to understand, Mr. Adair, that if I do not agree to alter what you call the domestic arrangements, you will give me a week's notice, or perhaps pay a week's rent and go without any notice at all?"

Mr. Adair had turned his face away; as he had done at a critical point of his interview with John Harper at the Colossus Hotel, he was trifling with some ornaments which were on the mantelpiece. He spoke very gently.

"I leave the matter in your hands, Miss Dennis. You have heard me, and—I have heard you. If you see your way to entertaining my proposal, well; if you don't, then also well. I hope that, in either event, you will allow me to remain as your lodger."

As the girl was turning to leave the room he said to her—

"By the way, Miss Dennis, I shall not be in to dinner."

She faced around.

"You told me you would be. Are you going out because of what has—happened? I have your dinner nearly prepared; and—in spite of what you suffer—it gives me pleasure to cook for you."

"Is that so?" He glanced at her. "Then—then—I shall be in."

When she had gone he said to himself:

"What is there in that girl's eyes which, when I look at them, makes me feel such an utter fool? I never met any one before whom I found it so difficult to look straight in the face. What the reason is beats me."

Miss Dennis, having returned to the back room, in which the figure was outlined under the bedclothes, kept repeating to herself, over and over again, one sentence:

"If I could only tell him! If I could only tell him! If I could only tell him!"

The six words were persistently shaping themselves in her brain. While she was cooking they were there; while she was taking in the dinner; while she was clearing the table; when she was back again in her own apartment. They obsessed her so completely that at last, sitting, leaning her elbows on a table, she hid her face in her hands, as if in that way she hoped to be able to shut them out.

IT WAS while she was in that position that a slight sound reached her ear. It was the sound of a faint whistle; so faint that it could only have been audible in the complete silence which reigned. She heard it on the instant. As she heard she started—took her elbows from the table, her face from her hands, and

Digitized by Google

sat up stark and rigid. The sound came again, even fainter than before. She rose slowly to her feet, and, moving as if she were about to do something which she hated, she went to a door at the back, which she unlocked, unbolted and unbarred. The instant the door was open a figure slipped through—the figure of a man. The moment he was in she closed the door—would have made it fast again had not the newcomer stopped her.

"Don't do that. Gordon is coming."

"Is he?" The girl seemed to catch her breath as she asked the question? "When?"

"How can I tell you? I only know he's coming—if he can."

The pair passed into the room in which was the figure under the bed-clothes.

"Is he in?"

"He is."

"I thought he was. I saw there was a light in his room."

"I believe he's going out."

"I wish he'd be quick and do it. The feeling that he's in the house always gives me the jumps."

Hitherto the man had worn a soft cloth cap; now, taking it off, he threw it on to a table. He was a young man, a few years older than the girl, with refined features, bold eyes, short black hair. He was dressed in a suit of gray tweed, with a small, dark green tie. There was a restlessness about him which suggested a mind ill at ease. His eyes seemed to be in all directions at once, his ears always wide open. He glanced towards the bedstead in the corner.

"Same as usual?" He asked the question beneath his breath; everything the two said to each other was spoken in whispers.

"Exactly. She is always the same; she never changes."

The young man, placing himself on the chair which the girl had lately occupied, stretched out his legs in front of him, thrust his hands into his trousers pockets, and looked up at her with a quizzical gleam in his fine eyes.

"Got any money?"

"I have not. Where am I likely to get money?"

"From him." He nodded his head toward the wall on the other side of which was Adair's sitting-room. The girl shivered.

"Thank you. I suppose it amuses you to talk like that; I wish it didn't."

"As a matter of fact it doesn't; but when the devil drives, needs must. I'm stony; dead broke. We all are."

"Don't talk to me about your friends, please."

"Gordon's as stony as I am—he's my friend, and I take it he's by way of being a friend of yours." The girl was silent. "Isn't he? You're changing, Win; your maidenly nature is being transformed. Each time I see you I realize more clearly that you're not the girl you used to be—especially where Gordon is concerned."

"Has nothing happened to change me? Could any one go through what I have and remain unchanged? Is such a thing possible?" She added, after a pause—"Do you imagine that you have not changed?"

"What a question!" He looked down at his boots as if he found them an amusing study. "When I think of what I was, and what I am—and what I propose to be—I used to lie awake at nights and dream of being Prime Minister, or the equivalent of that sometimes uncomfortable honor. Think of it! Me Prime Minister! Round every street corner I expect to find a policeman who's waiting for me."

"Charlie! What have you been doing now? Is that true? Are you afraid of a policeman?"

"I don't know that you choose quit the correct word. I'm not conscious of being 'afraid' of anything; but since I've hardly ever earned an honest penny in my life I wonder how you suppose I manage to live."

"I dare not think. Charlie, why can't you find honest work to do like other men?

"Where am I going to begin to look for it, with my record? I thought about starting a bucket-shop with the assistance of a few friends, but even that requires capital, and I've told you I'm stony. The world has used me badly; I am going to bleed the world."

"What nonsense you talk—as if what you call the world won't crush you out of existence; as if you and your sort have a chance against it!"

"I'm afraid we haven't. I'm sorry to admit it."

"Charlie, if I found you work would you do it?"

"What kind of work?" He eyed her with his critical gaze. "I don't know, Winnie, that I'm cut out to be a clerk, if that's the sort of work you propose to find

Digitized by Google

me. I could no more sit on a stool for a certain number of hours every day than I could increase the measure of my height by half a dozen inches.

"Certain sorts of work I could do, and I'd love to do; but I should never do them now—never. Be under no delusion, sister mine. Besides, where would you propose to find me work?" The girl was silent. "Would you ask the lodger to give me a job in his office—if he has one? He seems to be a man of mystery to you. Do you know any more about him than you did?"

"I don't wish to discuss him with you, and I won't."

"You'll have to discuss him with me—that's straight. I've got to get money—tonight. If I can't get it from anywhere else I'm going to get it from him, or you're going to get it for me."

"Charlie!" Something which was in the young man's tone almost more than in his words seemed all at once to cause the blood to recede from her cheeks. He shook his head at her, and smiled.

"It's no use looking at me like that; what I say I mean. I've got to get money from somewhere tonight, and I'm going to."

"What do you want it for?"

"That's my business. You can just take it from me that I've got to have it."

"How much?"

"As much as I can get."

"Would a sovereign do?"

"A sovereign!" Laughter trickled softly from his lips. "Say, a hundred, or even two."

"Have you come here to get one—two hundred pounds? You must be really mad."

"I'm not, not a bit. The lodger is rich."

"Who told you so? How do you know that?"

"I am capable of putting two and two together. From certain remarks which you, at various times, have dropped, I'm of opinion that at any rate he's good for a hundred."

"Charlie, will you—will you go, please?"

"Not without the money. I don't wish to be disagreeable in the very least, but I absolutely couldn't. I tell you, Winnie, I must have at least fifty pounds tonight, and the certainty of more within a day. You—or I—must get it from the lodger. You'd not find it a difficult thing to do; or, if you do, I shan't."

"Charlie, I don't wish to have a scene with you. I'm not feeling very well."

"You don't look it, my dear."

"So please—please go."

"Not without the money. Hush! There's some one outside. It's Gordon."

As the girl stood listening she went whiter even than before.

CHAPTER XVII

THE ORIGINAL OF THE PORTRAIT

THE girl said, under her breath, holding her hand to her side as if a sudden pain made it difficult for her to speak:

"Don't bring him in here; take him into the kitchen."

Her brother, getting up from his chair, laughed.

"Stuff! The kitchen! I am going to bring him in here. Why should I take the man you're going to marry into the kitchen?"

The speaker left the room to reappear presently with a companion who was perhaps some four or five years older than himself. The newcomer had rather a striking personality. He was tall, slight, dark, and when he smiled he showed a most beautiful set of teeth. He smiled as he approached Miss Dennis, hat in hand.

When she shrank back and held her fists tightly clenched beside her, the smile vanished; a curious hardness took its place.

As, holding himself very straight, he stood regarding her with half closed eyes, one almost felt that he was watching for a chance to pounce upon his prey. Charles Dennis, as if struck by his sister's attitude, half playfully went through a form of introduction.

"My dear Winnie, you don't seem to know the gentleman who stands in front of you; permit me to introduce to you Mr. Gordon Ray."

The person so designated spoke, still holding out his hand to her.

"My dear Winnie, you don't seem disposed to accord me a very hearty welcome."

So far the girl had remained with her eyes cast down; now raising them, she met his.

"Yet I wished to see you."

"Did you? Your manner doesn't suggest it. What have I done now to offend you?"

She went to a chest of drawers and returned holding something in her fingers which she had taken from a shabby leather box which stood on the top of it.

Digitized by Google

"You gave me this." Mr. Ray looked at what she was holding out to him.

"As a slight token of my affection, Winnie."

"Where did you get this brooch—before you gave it to me?"

The gentleman raised his eyebrows.

"Is it the custom nowadays for a young lady to ask the man who loves her where he got the gift he gave her—to ask it in quite that tone of voice?"

"I ask you, Gordon, where did you get this brooch?"

"And why, my dear Winnie, do you ask me? Whence this curiosity?"

"I ask because I do not believe it was ever yours to give me."

"There's something very queer in your manner, Winnie. Why don't you believe it?"

"Whose crest and monogram is this at the back?"

"I never pretended that the thing was new."

"And whose is the portrait inside?"

"I didn't know there was one; is there?"

"Gordon, I ask you again—where did you get this brooch?"

"My dear Winnie——"

"Don't call me that; you presume."

A shadow passed over the man's face.

"Do I? That's news."

"I wish to have no more to do with you. I do not want you to come to this house again, or ever to see you or speak to you. I am sorry I ever made your acquaintance; I wish it now to cease."

"You talk in a very extraordinary way, Miss Dennis. How long ago is it since you admitted that you loved me?"

"I never loved you; I never pretended that I did. Charlie introduced you as his friend; he told me wonderful stories about you, about the great things that you were going to do for him. At his request, for his sake, I listened to you.

"I was sorry that I had done so almost directly afterward. I doubted what Charlie told me all along. I suspected you of being an influence in his life for evil instead of good; I know it now. I have found you out, Mr. Ray. So you will please be so good as to leave this house at once, and never return to it—and take this brooch with you. I regret to say that I wore it once; I have felt its contaminating touch ever since."

Her brother interposed.

"What twaddle are you talking? What's all this fuss about a brooch? Let me look at the thing."

"I prefer to return it to Mr. Ray."

The hawk-faced man took from her fingers the trinket she held out to him; his countenance seemed overshadowed.

"What is the thing?" asked Charlie Dennis.

"That's what I'm wondering myself, my boy. To tell the truth, I don't remember giving the thing to Winnie. Do you say it contains a portrait? If it does, how do you get at it? I see nothing which suggests anything of the kind. What is there wonderful about the portrait, if there is one? How did you find out about the thing?"

The speaker was holding the trinket close up to his eyes, as if he were looking for a spring.

"I found out from the owner."

"The owner? What the devil do you mean?" The hand which held the brooch suddenly dropped; an ominous expression had come on Mr. Ray's countenance. "What do you mean by 'you found out' from the owner? Who is the owner?"

"He is the gentleman who occupies apartments in this house."

"What! The lodger?" The speaker was Charlie Dennis. "This is getting funny. How do you know the thing belongs to him?"

"Because the portrait which is in the brooch is the portrait of his father."

The two men looked at each other as if they did not understand. Dennis was the first to speak.

"That doesn't sound like a sufficient reason, does it, Ray? It doesn't follow that a brooch which contains a man's portrait necessarily belongs to his son, or I should be possessed of more extensive property."

Mr. Ray was feeling the brooch with his nicely pointed fingers.

"I still see nothing to suggest that it does contain a portrait."

"If you will give it to me I will show you."

In the girl's hand the back flew open; the miniature was revealed. Mr. Ray examined it very closely. Young Dennis observed him with laughing eyes—as if from his point of view the whole business was a joke.

"What sort of looking party is this person, Gordon? Does he squint?"

Mr. Ray, having ceased for the moment his examination of the portrait, with knitted brows stood staring into vacancy.

Digitized by Google

"I know this face; everybody knows this face; it's a familiar face. Whose is it? What is the name of the gentleman who occupies your apartments?"

"Mr. Martin Adair?"

"That sounds like a crib from an old song. You say this is a likeness of his father? Who told you so?"

"He told me so himself."

"I wonder if the man is a liar."

"That I am sure he is not. Mr. Adair is the soul of truth."

"Is he? The paragon! Fancy a man, any man, being the soul of truth—my hat! All I can say is that if his name's Adair, and this is the portrait of his father, there's something funny somewhere; because I'm perfectly certain that the name of our friend in the miniature was nothing like Adair. I can't get it for the moment, but I'm sure that this man's name was not Adair. It's on the tip of my tongue; I've got it! This is really—droll."

The fashion of Mr. Ray's countenance had changed. He seemed to be endeavoring to solve a knotty problem which had all at once presented itself to his mind. Charlie Dennis asked questions.

"What's up, Gordon? Who is the man? What's at the bottom of this bag of mystery?"

"If Mr. Martin Adair is not a liar—then he is a liar."

"That seems to be cleverly said, but what does it mean?"

"Either he lied when he said that this man was his father, or he lied when he said that his own name was Adair. For a gentleman who is the soul of truth he seems to be in rather an unfortunate position."

"Gordon, what are you driving at? Let's have it, man. Let's look at the brooch. Who is this nice, clean-looking Johnnie?"

"That's the portrait of the Marquis of Staines. Does the name convey nothing to you, Dennis?"

"STAINES! Wasn't that the racing Johnnie who came such a cropper?"

"The same. A sort of replica of that portrait, only on a much larger scale, hung in my father's office. The year he won the Derby his portrait was everywhere. You know my father had a good deal to do with racing——"

"Yes, I know." There was a saturnine smile on young Dennis's lips.

"I remember it hanging in his office for years. I suppose that's how it came to impress itself on my memory—— My word! There's another thing!" Again Mr. Ray's countenance suddenly changed. "Dennis, we're—we're on to something."

"Then I hope it's something good." Dennis was looking at the miniature. "He was not bad-looking if this is like him."

"That must have been painted when he was a young man. He died in 1890. I believe he was nearly as old as the century. I had particular reasons for knowing something about the Staines family.

"The whole thing comes back to me. He had two wives; some said three. By the first he had one son. He married the second Marchioness of Staines when he was quite an old man; he had a son by her. The whole Staines family lived hard. The old man ate money; his eldest son in that respect was a chip of the old block; his younger son was worse still—I could tell you some tales about that Marquis of Staines and his two sons. I've heard a few.

"The old man died, as I said, in 1890, full of years and dishonor. His second wife was then not an old woman; her son was not then of age, but he was already up to the ears in debt. His father left him nothing. He had nothing to leave. His mother had a little money; the pair of them managed to scrape along on that.

"In 1901 I was junior clerk to a firm of solicitors who did a good deal of business for the Marquis of Staines. I have some sort of recollection of Lord Maurice Ashurst—that was the name of the old man's second son. He used to come sometimes to the office—I believe generally in the hope of raising money upon something. I know he seemed to me to be an awful swell; he carried himself with an air, was rather good looking, and tremendously tall. He was well over six foot. I'm not short, but I was a pigmy compared to him—— What's the matter, Winnie? Has anything upset you?"

The girl had sat down on a chair with a suddenness which suggested that for some cause she was unable to continue standing.

"There's nothing wrong with me; only, as I told you, I'm not feeling very well tonight. Go on."

"You seem to be interested in my story."

"I'm only wondering what it's all leading to."

Digitized by Google

"Your curiosity shall be presently gratified. Ten years ago or thereabouts, there came another crisis in the history of the Staines family, worse than any that had gone before. A gentleman who lent money at sixty per cent. and upwards—I forget his name, but I know it was generally upwards—had bills in his possession which he had received from Lord Maurice Ashurst, and which turned out to be forgeries.

"There was a pretty to-do. The Staines family went smash. His brother, the present Marquis, made an arrangement with his creditors—I believe that today he is living somewhere abroad on twopence a year. I fancy that what money he had went in covering his brother. The young gentleman's mother died—her son had killed her.

"The best of it was that young woman, to whom my Lord Maurice had been engaged, went bust with the family which she had hoped shortly to enter. The tale was that my Lord Maurice proposed to marry her for her cash, and without waiting for the actual ceremony had got rid of all she had in a manner at which the law looked askance.

"He disappeared. Not very long ago I met a man who used to sit at the next desk to mine. He told me that he had seen Lord Maurice Ashurst driving a cab—a hansom. He was quite sure that it was his lordship. If so, perhaps since then he has fallen lower still, as hansoms as a means of earning a livelihood are practically extinct. Dennis, let me look at the brooch again."

The younger man gave it him. Mr. Ray examined it closely, inside and out, with a queer gleam in his keen eyes.

"Fancy my giving you this, Winnie, without having the faintest notion of all that it conveyed! The portrait is certainly the portrait of the late Marquis of Staines—of that I'm certain; and what's more, here's a crest and monogram at the back which makes it surer still. The monogram is H. N. The second Marchioness of Staines was a Nowell—before marriage she was Harriet Nowell; I have reasons for knowing that.

"Apparently this brooch was her own personal property. I've a sort of idea that a lot of jewelry was given to her by her father, on her marriage, to be passed on to her children as heirlooms; you see the Staines jewels went to the elder son. Don't you think, Miss Dennis, that this is quite a romance?"

"I'm wondering how much of it is fact and how much fiction."

The girl seemed to speak with reluctance.

"That's a point, Miss Dennis, which in part may quickly be determined. Don't you see what all I've been telling you comes to? You're quick enough as a rule."

"Don't I tell you I'm feeling ill? I wish, Charlie, you would ask your friend to go."

Her brother laughed at her.

"I wish, Winnie, you wouldn't keep on talking nonsense. I'm sorry you're not well, but we're neither of us going—at least just yet."

When the young man stopped, Mr. Ray continued.

"What it all comes to, my dear Miss Dennis—since I am no longer to call you my dear Winnie—is this. The gentleman who occupies your apartments tells you that the miniature in this brooch is a portrait of his father. He even claims the brooch as his own. Then, in that case, doesn't it look very much as if the paragon whom you consider to be the soul of truth was Lord Maurice Ashurst, the missing forger? If so, no wonder he prefers to make himself known to you as Mr. Martin Adair."

"Of one thing I am assured, Mr. Ray—that Mr. Martin Adair is not only the soul of truth, but also the soul of honor."

"Your instinct tells you?"

"My instinct tells me—just as it told me something quite different of you. In both instances it was right."

"You think that Mr. Martin Adair is not Lord Maurice Ashurst?"

"On that point I think nothing. I only know that if he is, he has a good and sufficient reason for having dropped his own name, and that he is not the sort of character you suggest. On that I am prepared to stake my life."

"You seem suddenly to have recovered, Miss Dennis."

The girl was standing up, and was facing him with new life on her cheeks and in her eyes—in her whole bearing.

"You have acted on me as a tonic, Mr. Ray. When such a person as you sets himself to malign one in whom I have complete trust, his malice braces me up."

"My hat! Now I begin to understand why you would rather I no longer addressed you as my dear Winnie. Has the soul of truth got as far as that?"

The girl turned to her brother.

Digitized by Google

"CHARLIE, will you let your—acquaintance—insult your sister?"

"You start by insulting him; it seems to me that it's six for one and half a dozen for the other. I don't mind telling you, Winnie, that I think his suggestion is justified. You stand up for the lodger in a way that I don't like. I may tell you that I've not the slightest doubt that he's Lord Maurice Ashurst. I have never mentioned to you, Ray, that the last time I was here I had to masquerade as a woman. Certain gentlemen were showing such interest in my movements that a disguise seemed advisable, so I put on petticoats; you should have seen the fuss Winnie made when I turned up here as a dear, sweet lady."

"I don't know why Miss Dennis should make a fuss, I've always thought that you would make an excellent woman."

"So I do, and I did; I looked the part, and I played it to perfection. But that didn't keep Winnie from making a fuss. You can make a fuss about trifles, Winnie, can't you? When I left I was in a bit of a hurry. As I was going out of the garden gate a party was just coming through it. I never expected to see a soul, so I was taken completely aback. When he took off his hat and began to be nice I forgot my character entirely; I got him one with my left and another with my right, and I left him gaping."

The girl's thoughts suddenly flew back to the morning on which she had noticed that Martain Adair's lip was cut.

"Do you mean that you—struck him?" It was she who put the question.

"I do—two quite pretty blows. But this is the point, Gordon—you say you recollect Lord Maurice Ashurst as being tall, even beyond the ordinary tall man?"

"I don't think I exaggerate when I say that he was probably six foot four or five."

"That was about the height of the man I met at the gate—I had to reach up. Winnie, is the lodger uncommonly tall?"

"What has Mr. Adair got to do with you, Charlie, or with Mr. Ray?"

"Look at the way you talk to me, Winnie—the way you glare! Is the lodger more to you than your own brother? Is it strange that Ray should have suggested what he did? I have no doubt that you're perfectly right, Gordon, and that the pseudonymous Martin Adair is the forger Maurice Ashurst. Clearly that's what Winnie thinks herself; she gives the show away by her attitude."

"Are you two men going? Is it necessary that I should ask you again?"

"No, Winnie, we are not going. You can keep on asking. I told my sister, Ray, when I first came that I wanted money; that I'm in dire need of money. Would you mind telling her that you know that to be true?"

"My dear Charlie, I know that you're worse than penniless."

"I told Winnie that I wanted a hundred pounds."

"At least a hundred pounds."

"Yes, I said that I wanted at least a hundred pounds. If she hasn't got the money herself—and I'm quite willing to believe that she hasn't—then I asked her if she would get it for me from the lodger. According to her own showing he has pots full."

"If he has, it can't be honestly come by—that's on the face of it."

"Obviously; I don't suppose he has returned the money he stole."

"Of that you may be sure. I should have heard of it. The probability is that he has been up to some more of his nefarious tricks. The man must be a dangerous scoundrel, and your sister has been practically in the house alone with him."

"It's a dreadful thought, isn't it, Gordon? If I had had the least notion of what sort of character he really was I should have interfered before. As her brother, I do know that it is my duty to protect my sister—my only sister; just as I am her only brother—and in such dire need. The question is, Winnie, what do you propose to do?"

"I propose to ask you and your friend once more to leave the house."

"And how about your brother's—your only brother's—dire need, with that scoundrel in the next room wallowing in his ill-gotten gains? I have drawn deductions from your demeanor during this painful interview which make it clear to me that you have only to ask him for the hundred pounds I want, to get them. Are you going to ask him?"

Before the girl could answer the young man suddenly turned.

"Gordon, who's that? There's some one outside the window."

Mr. Ray seemed to be uneasy.

"It's probably the Pitcher. I left him in the lane; let's hope that nothing's wrong.

Digitized by Google

A soft whistle came through the window pane. "It's the Pitcher all right. You'd better go and see what's up."

The girl interposed.

"Understand, Charlie, I won't have any more of your acquaintances brought into this room."

Her brother looked at her, an unpleasant look upon his handsome face.

"You won't have! You'll have what I choose."

The young man went out of the room. The girl was left alone with Mr. Ray. The man's fingers were fiddling with the brooch. One felt that he was not so much at his ease as he strove to appear. Presently Dennis returned, with a second companion—an undersized, ill-favored, shabby, hungry-looking individual who looked as if his habitual dwelling-place were something not much better than the gutter. Dennis was excited.

"Gordon," he burst out, the moment he was in the room, "here's a pretty kettle of fish! You hear what the Pitcher's got to say."

The girl moved forward.

"I won't have that man——"

Her brother cut her sentence short, speaking with what was almost brutal violence.

"Who cares what you'll have? I've told you before you're going to have just what I choose. You keep your mouth shut till you're asked to open it. Now, Pitcher, tell him."

The man had a greasy cloth cap on his head. When the girl spoke, he took it off and began to twist it around and around, speaking in hoarse tones, as if a bad cold had robbed him of his voice.

"I beg the lady's pardon——"

Dennis cut him short.

"Never mind the lady. You concern yourself with Mr. Ray; tell him what you told me."

The man did as he was bid.

"It's like this, guv'nor—I was standing on the other side of the road, under the shadow of a tree, when I see a party come out of this house. I saw him as plainly as I see you; the sight of him gave me quite a start. When he had gone I had to come and tell you."

"What had you to come and tell me?"

"Why, guv'nor—" the man glanced furtively around; he raised his cap so as to serve as a screen to his lips— "it was the party from Mitre Court—straight it was."

"The party from Mitre Court? What do you mean?"

"Well, guv'nor, I should think it was pretty plain what I mean. I mean it was the party from Mitre Court—the party as killed old Creed, that's what I mean. And if that isn't plain enough I don't know what is."

CHAPTER XVIII

A RECOGNITION

MR. RAY still seemed as if he did not understand. He looked at the mean little man in front of him as if he were some poor cur whom he was disposed to treat to a beating.

"Didn't I tell you to wait outside and keep your eyes open until I gave you the signal?"

The little man seemed to cower in front of him.

"You did," he admitted.

"Then why haven't you waited? What do you mean by leaving your post before I told you?"

"I had to leave it, guv'nor—I had to! Seeing him gave me such a turn that I couldn't have stopped there no longer—not for anything. When he came out of the front door, and down the path, and through the garden gate, and I saw who it was, I felt as if I was going at the knees. Fancy him!

"I was thinking of him at the moment—I often am. But all the same he was the last person in this world I expected to see—and coming out of this house! Oh, I couldn't have kept on standing still." An idea seemed to enter the speaker's head. "Did you know that he lived here, either of you? Is that the game?"

It was Mr. Ray who replied, speaking with a sort of cold ferocity.

"No, it's not the game. Are you absolutely certain that the man you saw coming out of this house was our man?"

"Once seen never forgotten—that's the sort he is. I doubt if there's another man in London what's as tall as he is, to begin with. Can't I see him, standing in that office, looking down at the Mauler a-lying on the floor, and asking me 'Is this your mate?' That was a bit of a shock, I tell you; I expected to find it the other way

Digitized by Google

about—him on the floor, and the Mauler looking down.

" 'He started out to kill me,' he said, 'and now I'm wondering if I've killed him.' And so did I wonder. I never saw such a picture as he had made of the Mauler, and all inside of five minutes. And then you ask me if I'm mistaken when I tell you I've seen him again!

"And didn't I see him sneaking down the Court with his head bent, and his hands held up to his throat, and his cap drawn down over his eyes, after he'd killed old Creed? No, I'm not mistaken. He's just gone stalking down the lane, rigged up to the nines, and I stood there hungry, without so much as the price of a drink on me, and see him go!"

The man's earnestness was, in its way, grotesque. The two men and the girl looked at him, and listened. Then Mr. Ray moved a little back; he stood erect; he subjected the girl to a curious scrutiny, and he said—

"So this is your paragon!"

Her brother turned to her angrily.

"Did you know this?"

The girl, standing in front of them with downcast eyes, replied in a scarcely audible whisper—

"Did I know what?"

"Did you know who this man was, this—this informal lodger of yours? Stop this nonsense, Winnie; don't you pretend you're going to faint, for you're not. You hadn't better! I'm beginning to wonder if you're playing it off against me; you shan't have a chance of doing it again if you are. Answer me! Did you know who this man is?"

The girl raised her face and looked him straight in the eyes.

"I know that he is an upright and an honorable gentleman; that is enough."

"That is not enough for me. You answer my question. Did you know that the fellow whom you call Martin Adair is the fellow who's masquerading as old Creed's heir?"

"What old Creed?"

"Old Creed the money-lender and—dealer in general securities." He accompanied the last words with a sardonic grin.

"I did not know it."

"Then let me tell you that he is; and you call the creature an honorable gentleman! A forger who manages to save his skin only by sneaking about under another name, and by practising on the credulity of simple-minded and wrong-headed females; a blackguard who has got possession of old Creed's hoards, he alone knows how——"

"After killing him, guv'nor, after killing him—don't forget that. First he does for the old gentleman, then he calls himself his heir."

The interposition came from the individual they called the Pitcher.

"If you're suggesting that Mr. Adair killed Mr. Jerningham Creed——"

"How did you know old Creed's name was Jerningham?"

"I do know." The girl was holding herself straight enough then.

"We don't suggest it—we state it as a fact."

"Then if all your facts are like that one, they're a tissue of lies, which is what I believe them to be. I know that he did not kill Jerningham Creed."

"You know? You speak with a great deal of assurance. You might have killed him yourself. It so happens that we know better. We know he killed him. You see with us also it's a case of knowing, and I rather fancy you'll find that we have better grounds for knowing than you have."

Mr. Ray laid his hand lightly on the young man's arm.

"Leave all that, Charlie; your sister may be safely left to reconcile what she knows and what she doesn't know with her own conscience. Let's come to business. You say, Pitcher, you saw him go out."

"He went stalking down the lane at five miles an hour with those long legs of his. Directly he turned the corner I came in to you."

"Then he's out now?"

"He must be, since he hasn't come back."

Ray addressed himself to Charlie.

"Which are his rooms?"

"His sitting-room is next to this on the other side of that wall; his bedroom is overhead."

It was probably because of something which she saw pass between the two men that the girl crossed the room, so that when they turned she was standing with her back to the door.

"You are not going into his rooms," she said.

Her brother laughed, and glanced at Ray.

"Dear me! Aren't we? And who said we wanted to go into his rooms?"

Digitized by Google

"Whether you want to or not, you're not going."

"You hear that, Gordon?" Young Dennis was still smiling. "There's a pretty sister for you! What are we to do with her?"

Ignoring the young man, Gordon Ray addressed his reply to his sister.

"Miss Dennis, the man you call Adair, and whose name is not Adair, is the biggest scoundrel in London."

"You say that, do you?" There was biting significance in the girl's tone; there was still more in her look.

"I say it; and, as you so kindly hint, I am a good judge of scoundrels. This man—your friend Adair——"

"I should be proud indeed if I thought that he would let me call him friend."

"That's very sweet of you. I was about to remark that this man, whom you would so dearly like to call your friend, is in possession of certain valuable property of ours——"

"I don't believe it; you never had any valuable property, either of you."

So far as comment went he let her interruption go unheeded.

"Which we have made several efforts to regain. We have endeavored to lay the facts before him, to appeal to his sense of honor, which you esteem so highly——"

"No more highly than it deserves."

"So far, everything we have done has been in vain. He still retains our property. And, as I told you, it is worth a great deal of money."

"And I tell you that, in that case, I am sure it was never yours. How could either of you come honestly into the possession of property worth a great deal of money?"

"I'm not going to enter into a discussion with you, Miss Dennis. It is enough that he has what belongs to us, that we want it, that we mean to have it."

"Then get it—if you can. But since even you are not likely to pretend that anything of yours is in this house, and since as Mr. Adair's landlady I am responsible for the safe custody of what Mr. Adair has in the rooms for which he pays me rent, I will take care that you don't take advantage of his absence to force your way into his private apartments."

Mr. Ray looked at the girl, then turned to her brother.

"You hear what your sister says? What are we to do? I want to run the rule over what that fellow has in his rooms, and I'm going to do it. Perhaps you'll explain that to your sister."

"And I tell you that you shall do nothing of the kind!"

The girl's scorn was almost tragic as she stood confronting him, erect, white-faced, hot-eyed, her back against the door. Ray motioned to her with a little gesture of his hand; he spoke again to her brother.

"You hear? Are you going to deal with her, or must I? I tell you I'm going to look through that man's things—we mayn't have such a chance again. He's done us; now we'll do him. Quite possibly we may come on something which will give us the whip hand of him, and make him the under dog. As time is precious—he may return at any moment—are you going to invite your sister to move from that door, or must I?"

Young Dennis, who had been observing his sister steadily, moved close to her, menace in his air.

"Winnie, come away from that door."

"I shall not!" The girl, suddenly turning, caught at the key in the lock. In an instant her brother had gripped her wrist.

"Don't touch me!" she screamed. "Charlie! take your hands off! I'm going to lock this door."

"You're not. Don't think it. Leave go of that key. Leave go!"

"You coward!" she cried.

THE brother and sister struggled. She clung to the handle of the key which she strove to turn in the lock; he did his best to drag her away. Suddenly he caught her round the waist, and putting forth all his strength, not only forced her to loose her hold, but sent her spinning round till, stumbling over a chair, she went crashing with it to the floor. The force of her fall seemed to shake the house; it even caused what appeared to them to be something very like a miracle. The figure outlined beneath the bedclothes moved; there came a strange sound from the bed; the figure raised itself.

"Mother!" cried the girl.

"What's happened to her?" asked her brother, staring as if the bed contained a ghost, which, recalled to life, was about to take its walks abroad. To Gordon Ray the restoration to sentient being of the mother of this brother and sister who contended together conveyed no meaning. It

Digitized by Google

merely offered him the opportunity he sought. The door being left unguarded, he turned the handle and in an instant was out of the room, the miserable being whom he had addressed as the Pitcher following close at his heels.

Realizing what his action meant, Charles Dennis went quickly after him. The girl seemed undecided what to do; then she turned to the bed. As she did so she heard the door of Mr. Adair's sitting-room thrown roughly open, and the tumultuous entry of the three men.

Again her impulse was to prevent their felonious intentions. She turned from the bed toward the door. It seemed as if she were about to follow them out of the room—she even got as far as the passage, when she was stayed by another sound. She heard a latch key being inserted in a lock; the street-door opened; Martin Adair came into the hall. At sight of him she reeled; but for the supporting wall she might have fallen again.

"Thank God!" she said. "You have come!"

CHAPTER XIX

THE LODGER INTERVENES

THE three men in the sitting-room were too occupied with what they possibly would have described as "running the rule" over the lodger's possessions to notice what was taking place in the hall. There was a green leather desk on a side table; they removed it to the table in the center. Ray and Dennis were bending over it, the Pitcher was looking on.

"A chisel would be the best way into this." The speaker was Gordon Ray. He took a small leather case from the hip-pocket of his trousers, and from the case three pieces of steel which, fitting into each other, became a sort of miniature crowbar. It was done in two or three seconds. He was about to use this tool to pry the desk open when a voice inquired—

"May I ask, gentlemen, what you're doing at that desk?"

The three men were taken aback. When they perceived who the speaker was their attitudes suggested a variety of emotions. Charles Dennis stood staring at him, sullen-faced; Ray, the sharp edge of his tool still in actual contact with the desk, scarcely moved; the Pitcher stood in shambling confusion, seeming to have visibly decreased in size. The girl, not altogether hidden by Adair's tall figure, was visible in the hall beyond. As if desiring to smooth matters over, she said falteringly:

"I don't think they have done much harm. I asked them not to go into your room, and they haven't had time."

"Those last words of yours, Miss Dennis, possibly constitute a saving clause—they haven't had time. Good evening, gentlemen."

He went a little farther into the room.

"Good evening, Lord Maurice Ashurst."

The greeting came from Gordon Ray. He still stooped over the desk, apparently unashamed, seeming disposed to continue his attempt to pry it open. Adair observed him with a characteristic smile lighting up his whole face. If the greeting were unexpected, he showed no signs of surprise. He merely remarked—

"I think, sir, I have had the pleasure of seeing you before."

"I have certainly seen you before, Lord Maurice Ashurst, although it was no pleasure; and I quite appreciate the reasons which induced you, dropping your own mired name, to call yourself Martin Adair."

Mr. Adair addressed the girl with a courteous deference which never seemed to fail him.

"If you'll excuse me, Miss Dennis, I should like to have a few moments alone with these three gentlemen."

"Don't you make any mistakes about it, my lad; she knows all about you—we've taken care of that. She knows the kind of fraud you are," said Charlie Dennis.

Adair closed the door; then his glance rested on the Pitcher.

"I said three gentlemen—I think, after all, I can dispense with one of you and talk things over with the remaining two." He addressed the Pitcher. "You are the man who acted as cover to your friend the Mauler. Is he still alive?"

The little man shuffled; he was obviously distressed.

"No thanks to you if he is," he answered. "There was a time when it looked as if you'd have to swing for him."

"One doesn't have to what you call 'swing' for creatures like that, any more than one would have to swing for you if you dropped out. Your friends may not be

Digitized by Google

particular, but I find it difficult to breathe in a room the air of which is contaminated by your presence. Permit me to call your attention to the door."

He held it wide open. The Pitcher went without an attempt at remonstrance. Even his friends said nothing. As if glad of the chance he bolted through the door, across the hall, out of the house. He shut the hall door behind him with a bang. They heard his steps along the path. Then a husky voice shouted—

"Who killed old Creed?"

In the silence which followed they heard the Pitcher, without waiting for an answer to his own question, running down the lane.

Then Mr. Adair, quietly closing the sitting-room door and turning, regarded his uninvited guests with a smile.

"Well, gentlemen, what have you to say to me?"

For a moment the pair said nothing; then young Dennis blustered:

"You've got what belongs to us, you know perfectly well. If you'd handed it over, or the coin, we shouldn't be here. You may play the gentleman with a high hand over others, but you're not going to do it with us; so don't you make any mistake, my Lord Maurice Ashurst, alias Martin Adair."

The young man's violence left Adair cold. He was suavity itself.

"You are Mr. Charles Dennis; I have your portrait."

The young man started.

"What do you mean?"

"To be accurate, I have three portraits of you. Neither is good as an example of the photographic art, which they are not meant to be; but in each the likeness is unmistakable. I also have some biographical notes of you, Mr. Charlie Dennis; it appears that you are an unconvicted felon.

"Besides minor matters you have been concerned in at least four big jewel robberies. On each occasion you brought your booty to Mr. Jerningham Creed. Three times you received cash for it; on the fourth occasion he died before he could pay what, as a thief, was due to you. I believe it is the stolen property which you brought to him on that fourth occasion to which you refer when you say that I have what belongs to you.

"You are mistaken. In the first place, the act of stealing conveys no title; in the second, what you stole has been restored to the owner. The owner acknowledged its receipt only a day or two ago. I shall be happy to show you that acknowledgment whenever you choose, or even, if you doubt its authenticity, to introduce you to the owner.

"I think, Mr. Dennis, that concludes what I have to say to you, and probably also what you have to say to me. Since accounts are settled between us, don't you think you might follow your malodorous friend, and without further intruding on your sister, go?"

When Adair stopped, the young man kept still. What he had just heard seemed to have taken the stiffness out of his joints. He glowered at the speaker with eyes in which were both rage and fear. Turning to his friend he moistened his lips with the tip of his tongue and said—

"You hear what he says?"

Ray's reply was curt.

"I heard."

"Do you—do you believe it?"

Mr. Adair interposed.

"With what your friend believes I am not at the moment concerned. As for yourself, I will give you every proof of the correctness of my statement you may require; only—the matter may become awkward if you require me to do that. I do not wish to compound a felony, nor on the other hand do I care to invite the interference of the police."

"That I can quite believe, for your own sake. You might find them troublesome to you," the young man snarled.

"I won't pretend to misunderstand you; I will merely remark, Mr. Dennis, that you talk of what you know nothing. Is there anything else which you wish to say before you go? If so, consider well before you say it—remembering that I know a great deal about you, and that you know very little about me."

"Except that you're——"

"Yes—except that I'm what?"

Young Dennis had left his sentence unfinished when he caught the other's glance; he seemed reluctant to finish it even when invited. Instead he returned to his former tone of bluster.

"Never mind. I don't want to bandy words with you. Only I'll have you know this—that this house belongs to my mother, who is an invalid; so if you think you can take advantage of my sister——"

"Stop, Mr. Dennis, if you please. I

Digitized by Google

think that the subject of your sister is one which you had better let alone—you soil her name by allowing it to pass your lips. I've had enough of you, for the present; a little of you goes a long way. Leave my room, sir, and the house."

Hesitant, the young man turned again to his friend.

"Shall I go?"

There was a slight movement of raised eyebrows, as if he sneered.

"What a question to ask me!"

One could see the young man wince.

"Are you going to stay?" The young man's tone was savage. "I don't see what good you're going to do if you do."

"Perhaps not; perhaps there's a good deal that you don't see."

"Is that meant for——Ray, what do you mean by that?"

"Mr. Dennis, I am waiting. Your friend is going to stay till I have said a few words to him. I wish to be alone with him. Be so good as to leave us together."

Nothing could have been suaver than Adair's tone, and as far as the young man was concerned nothing could have had a more persuasive effect.

"You needn't think I want to stop—and you needn't think either that I'm going because you want me to." Charles Dennis strode into the hall. When he already had the open front door in his hand he shot a last arrow. "I might be able to put up with a blackguard, masquerading forger, but I can't breathe in the same room as a murderer—and that's why I'm going."

Whatever might have been the reason, the young gentleman went, banging the door behind him even louder than the Pitcher had done. Martin Adair, gently closing the door of his sitting-room, turned to Mr. Gordon Ray with so easy a smile that one wondered if Charles Dennis's last pointed remark had been inaudible.

"NOW, Mr. Ray, I have to deal with you."

"And with this."

This was a revolver which Mr. Ray had all at once produced from his jacket-pocket.

Adair shook his head, still smiling.

"No, Mr. Ray, not with that. I thought that you were wise enough to be aware that toys were for children, not for men."

"You'll find that this is no toy, if you don't watch out."

"Is that so? Mr. Ray, I have no less than seven portraits of you. If you only knew how much that means!"

"As it happens I don't. For all I care you can have seventy."

"Those seven portraits would represent seven convictions. Each time one was taken you were in the act of committing a crime. I have full particulars of each of those crimes in black and white."

"So you may have! How about the crime you committed when you forged certain names on certain papers? Do you think I don't remember you? I have only got to speak a few words in certain quarters, and you'll sleep in jail tonight—and you'll keep on sleeping there for years."

"Speak your words, Mr. Ray; as I said to the young gentleman who has just gone, you talk about what you know nothing."

"Oh, don't I? I suppose you deny that you're Maurice Ashurst. I could tell you as much of your history as you know yourself. Don't know what I'm talking about, don't I?"

"No, Mr. Ray, you do not; you may think you do, but you don't. I remember you. I've a memory for faces; I've been searching it since I came into the room—I remember where I saw your face before I saw it in those seven portraits. You were a clerk in the office of Messrs. King, Haygrove and Banner, by whom you were so unfortunate as to be prosecuted for embezzlement; for which, being found guilty, you were sentenced to six months hard labor. Oh, yes, I remember you, Mr. Ray—although then your name was not Ray."

"I never pretended to be a model character," snapped Ray, "but I never committed forgery, and I never killed a man. There's some one in London who as good as saw you kill old Creed; and at this moment you are doing yourself like a fighting-cock on stolen goods, yet you stand there like a varnished saint and pass yourself off as if you were something superior in plaster gods, and you have the cheek to talk to me as if I were a sort of character who isn't fit to black your boots. We've all got our little weaknesses, Lord Maurice Ashurst; but I'm not a —— hypocrite, and you are.

"Now let's come to business. I conveyed—we'll call it conveyed—with some friends of mine, Lady Barnes's emeralds, and other little trinkets of hers. We took

Digitized by Google

a lot of trouble over that job—we earned them. Then we took them to Creed, and we valued them at fifteen hundred pounds; they cost some one more than fifteen thousand. Creed was willing to give us the money—he was fair enough in his way, and I've reason to believe that he drew fifteen hundred pounds from the bank in sovereigns for us. We were to have had the money before ten o'clock on the morning of Wednesday, the thirteenth of May.

"You know what happened on the Tuesday night before, or rather early that Wednesday morning—you know; no one better. You've got the whole bag of tricks; you must have got hundreds of thousands of pounds' worth of goods which didn't honestly belong even to old Creed, and which certainly don't honestly belong to you. You've done it very well.

"I'm not offering a word of criticism, Lord Maurice Ashurst; but don't you think it's playing a little low down, considering that you're sticking to our emeralds, the fruits of our labor, that you're sticking to our fifteen hundred sovereigns which are a drop in the bucket compared to what you've got? From what I know of Creed's little ways, I'm willing to bet a trifle that those fifteen hundred sovereigns were put up for us in a nice little box, with a name outside which I'll mention with the greatest pleasure if you'd like to hear it.

"You're a clever man, and a strong one, and well plucked—you must have the pluck of the devil—I admit all that; but compared to you I'm an innocent babe. I'm not afraid of you, though I know murder is looking out at me from your smiling eyes; and I tell you that you're the biggest blackguard, thief, and low-down hound of whom I've ever heard. Now that I have favored you with a piece of my mind perhaps you'll let me know if you'll hand me those fifteen hundred sovereigns."

"The eloquence with which you plead your cause almost persuades me, Mr. Ray. You perhaps did not notice that I told your young friend that the stolen property had been returned to the owner."

"You told him! Yes, I daresay! You told his sister that your name was Martin Adair. Tell some other tale to me; hand over those fifteen hundred sovereigns."

"If you will come to Mitre Court tomorrow morning, Mr. Ray, I will show you the list of jewels which were returned to Lady Barnes, and her acknowledgment of their receipt, together with other details connected with the matter which you may find interesting. If you're not satisfied with the evidence you shall have what you call 'your' fifteen hundred sovereigns. That is a sporting offer."

"What are you playing at?"

"All the goods which Jerningham Creed purchased from the male and female rascals who stole them are being returned to their rightful owners, if living; to their heirs, if dead. In each case the fullest explanations are being given. Mr. Creed left behind him memoranda which lack nothing in candor. He put down in black and white from whom each lot of goods was purchased, how much he paid, from whom they were stolen; so that the work of restoration is rendered comparatively easy. Those memoranda show that you were one of his regular customers, Mr. Ray. You seem to have been connected with robberies galore; in most of them the police do not seem to have even guessed at the identity of the thieves. I make no comment on the fact; I only state it."

For the first time, as Gordon Ray observed with his keen eyes the smiling man in front of him, a look of uneasiness seemed to come upon his face, as if he were not quite sure what manner of man this was with whom he was dealing. He even gave his doubt expression.

"Either you have a face of brass beyond anything I ever heard of, or as a curiosity you take the cake. The more you keep on talking the more I keep on asking myself—what is he playing at? What, for instance, do you think you want with me? I can see you want something—what is it?"

"Now we're coming to the point. What I want with you is something very simple. You gave Miss Dennis a brooch."

"A brooch? What brooch? Who told you I did?"

"I know you did; I needed no telling. How did that brooch come into your possession? That is what I want from you—that simple little piece of information."

Mr. Ray's thin, keen face seemed to be compressed within its smallest dimensions—it was nearly all nose, brow and chin.

"Suppose I were to tell you that I bought it at a jeweler's shop in the Strand."

"I should ask you the jeweler's name and number. I ought perhaps to disabuse your mind upon one point, Mr. Ray—any

Digitized by Google

information you may give me will not be used to your disadvantage."

"Why do you wish to know?"

"For a reason of which I believe you are aware. The brooch was once my mother's. When she died I thought that it was still in her possession. I merely want to trace its after history."

"I didn't get it from your mother."

"So I imagined."

Mr. Ray's eyes seemed to have grown smaller with the rest of his face. Little of them but the pupils were visible; they were fixed upon the other as if they were two points of light.

"I believe you were once acquainted with Lady Louisa Southworth."

FOR a moment Adair was silent. A shadow seemed to steal over his face; one felt that in some way the words had hurt him.

"You are so good as to say so, Mr. Ray."

"You and she were once engaged to be married."

The shadow on the other's face grew deeper; his lips tightened.

"What has this to do with the question I asked you, Mr. Ray?"

"You'll find that it has a great deal to do with it when I've got there. When—some one—forged certain names to certain deeds, Lady Louisa Southworth had just turned twenty-one. When the forger was discovered, what money she had went by the board. She might have prosecuted, but she didn't. To show that she was conscious of her indebtedness to Lady Louisa, your mother, when she died, left her all her jewels. Lady Louisa, however, did not long retain them in her possession; shortly after she became their owner—they were lost. That brooch was one of them. The rest of the jewels, I take it, are in your possession."

"By which you mean?"

"They were sold—by the finders, to Jerningham Creed. Haven't you found them among the rest of his hoards? Aren't they part of your inheritance? How about that memorandum book of which you spoke? Aren't they entered, with details about the original owner, the—conveyor, the price which was paid, and so on? I thought you said that Creed had a memorandum book in which all that sort of thing was entered."

"I have come upon the rest of the jewels. As you put it, they are part of my inheritance—they are entered in that memorandum book. But for once in a way the entry is vague; the articles are enumerated, but there is no mention of owner, seller, or price—which is why I have come to you for information. I also wondered if that brooch was part—of the rest."

"It was and it wasn't. She lost it at the same time; but when it came into my hands I kept it as a sort of perquisite. I kept it—oh, for a good long time; then I made a present of it to a lady."

"You gave it to Miss Dennis."

"I did. Has she told you?"

"The brooch which you stole from Lady Louisa Southworth you gave to Miss Dennis."

"Granting that what you say is right, Lord Maurice Ashurst, as regards Lady Louisa you and I seem to be in the same boat. You robbed her of all her money; I—found her jewels. By your showing we are birds of a feather; only she suffered a good deal more at your hands than she did at mine—and I was never engaged to the lady."

"How dare you give a thing you stole to Miss Dennis?"

"How dare I? Come, that's good! Considering the game you've played, to put it mildly, you seem to have had as much courage as I had. I dare give that brooch to Winifred Dennis because—I dare and had a right to give her anything."

"On what grounds? Because you had scraped some sort of blackguard acquaintance with her young scamp of a brother?"

"My dear Lord Maurice Ashurst, Miss Dennis occupied toward me the same position which Lady Louisa Southworth once occupied toward you—she was engaged to be my wife. What's the game? Stop that! Don't you lay a finger——"

Before Mr. Ray could finish his sentence the other was around the table and on him. He raised his revolver.

"I'll shoot!" he said.

Before his words were fully spoken Adair had wrenched the revolver from his hand.

"You'll shoot!" Adair had turned the muzzle of the weapon toward its original holder. "You'll shoot?" he repeated.

Gordon Ray was agile in his movements. Used to tight corners, he prided himself on always being ready for an emergency; on that occasion he found himself in a position

Digitized by Google

in which all his resources availed nothing. His revolver was taken from him as a toy might be snatched from a child; he was bent backward over the table with fingers about his throat, which he realized would only need to be pressed a little tighter to squeeze the life right out of him.

Resistance was out of the question; he could not breathe; a film was forming before his eyes; all the muscles in his body were twitching as if in a sudden convulsion. Then the grip of the fingers relaxed; he slipped off the table, or rolled, he knew not how it was, and lay on the floor an inert mass. Presently a voice said—

"Get up!" He did not know how or why, but he got up. He felt himself to be unsteady on his feet. His throat seemed still to be compressed; he put up his fingers as if to ease it; with an odd, hazy feeling he looked up at the man in front of him.

"That was a very near thing." He spoke in tones which he knew were not in the least like his own. "Another little squeeze and you would have killed me."

"If you are ever nearer death, Mr. Ray, you'll never return to life again. I nearly killed you, but I didn't quite, because you dared to say that Miss Dennis was—engaged to a thief like you. Take my advice—never hint at anything of that kind again; lest worse befall you."

Mr. Ray still fingered his throat.

"You must be made of steel. I have tried conclusions with some strong men, but never with one like you. Your fingers gripped my throat like—nothing I ever heard of. In your hands I was like a child; it was a new experience. I sha'n't forget that grip of yours, ever."

"Shall I open the door for you, Mr. Ray, or can you see yourself off the premises? If you are wise you will see yourself, lest, should I have again to touch you, I should use more force than was required."

"That's true; you might. I think I'll take your advice and see myself out into the street. Are you going to give me back my revolver?"

"I am not."

"I've got another in the other pocket of my jacket—I've got my finger on the trigger now."

There was an explosion.

Something happened again to Mr. Ray; in the very moment of the explosion he was picked up, thrown upon the table, a second revolver was taken from the other pocket in his jacket. The weapon was still smoking. There was a hole in the cloth showing where the bullet had gone through; there was also a hole on the wall above Mr. Adair's head, made by the bullet which had been meant for him.

Before he had recovered his breath sufficiently to utter a sound, Gordon Ray was being borne from the room, through the passage, out of the front door, along the garden path. When the garden gate was reached he was flung through the air out on the road.

There Mr. Adair left him. He stood for a moment or two to see if he moved. Since the man continued motionless he went back along the path, into the house, and closed the door. Then he stood in the passage listening. The house seemed curiously still. He took out his handkerchief and wiped his lips; then passed it across his brow. He returned to his sitting-room door, which stood wide open, hesitated—then passed to the room behind.

"Miss Dennis!"

Although he did not speak loudly, his voice must have been audible to any one within. When there was no answer he turned the handle and spoke again.

"Miss Dennis!"

WHEN there was still silence, he opened the door and looked into the room. The girl was on the floor in an attitude which was eloquent, her face hidden on the faded eiderdown quilt which covered the bedstead in the corner. He moved a step or two into the room, addressing her a third time.

"Miss Dennis!"

The girl turned to him a face which was too full of anguish to permit of tears. One doubted if, at first, she recognized him; then, gathering herself together, with wavering action she rose to her feet—and she looked into his eyes. After a silence, which he felt powerless to break, she whispered—

"Mother is dead."

There was a significance in the way she said it which was beyond his understanding.

"She died when I was trying to keep them from going into your room—she moved for the first time for years when Charlie threw me on to the floor. Did she know what he wanted to do? I hope she didn't."

The four last words came from her like

Digitized by Google

a wail of despair. Something happened to the man who was in front of her—somehitng which lifted him out of himself, which he had to obey. Without uttering a word, scarcely knowing what it was he did, he held out his arms to her.

She shrank back, trembling from head to foot as if afraid. Then that something seemed to come to her which had come to him—which she had to obey. She went unsteadily toward him, as if not moving of her own volition, until she had passed between his outstretched arms. Then they folded around her.

"Mother is dead," she wailed.

The relief came to her which comes with tears; sobs shook her as if they would tear her to pieces, and he comforted her as if she were a little child.

CHAPTER XX

IN MITRE COURT

JOHN HARPER and Martin Adair were alone together in the chambers at Mitre Court, in the apartment which Jerningham Creed had used as a storehouse and a sitting-room. Adair was opening one of the metal cases which fitted the divisions in Mr. Creed's steel-lined cupboard with so much nicety. The case being opened, he took out some of the contents and laid them carefully on the table.

"I have been able to supply the missing entry," he observed.

Harper glanced at him and then at the articles which he had displayed upon the table. They consisted of a number of trinkets of all sorts. Among them was a necklace which Harper, taking into his hand, felt gently with his fingers.

"Whoever bought your mother her jewels showed a pretty taste, Adair. For instance, these are very nice brilliants in this necklace. It's as pretty a necklace as a lady could want to see."

"I believe my father gave it to her when they were married. That year was one of his lucky ones. I fancy he did well with cards as well as horses. For that necklace he actually paid ready cash—one of the few occasions in his life on which he paid cash for anything."

"How about the missing entry? Can you really fill in those two or three vacant lines in what is certainly one of the most interesting volumes I ever saw?"

"You can't say, Harper, that you don't know a good deal about me now. You know all about my people, and I think you may have heard of Lady Louisa Southworth."

"I have heard a good deal about her."

"Her association with us was the tragedy of her life."

Adair paused. He was walking about the room with his hands in his trouser pockets. He stood and turned toward Harper with a whimsical smile upon his face.

"I say with us; there are people who would write it with me, but they would be wrong. It's a complicated story. I knew her almost from the hour she was born; her mother was my mother's friend. Even when she was a baby—her mother was always stopping with my mother—I used to carry her off with me into the woods at home. The two mothers put their heads together; they arrived at conclusions of their own. So when things were worse than ever, and I was a man, an understanding had grown up that Louisa's fortune was to be used to restore our waning glories—I was to marry her. Did you ever care for a woman, Harper?"

Mr. Harper was silent. He glanced at the necklace which he was still holding then looked up at the tall figure which stood before the window.

"There are questions which, even when I put them to myself, I prefer to leave unanswered."

"So?" Adair laughed. "You've answered mine, and you've doubtless learned that one may care for a woman in many ways. I cared for Louisa Southworth in one of them. Though I was not keen to marry any one, I was not indisposed to marry her. Then—things went smash; we went smash, and we smashed her."

The speaker resumed his walking about the room.

"It was, I think, my blackest hour when I realized that our ruin had involved hers. Everything was so—hopeless that, at that time, it was the wildest kind of nonsense to hope for anything, yet I told myself that, from thenceforward, it should be the one object of my existence to make good to Louisa Southworth. And Jerningham Creed has placed it in my power to—at least in one respect—fulfil my dream. It's very extraordinary, Harper, very extraordinary indeed.

Digitized by Google

"My mother, thinking to make some atonement, gave her jewels to Louisa. Some scoundrels stole them from Louisa and sold them to Creed; they are on the table in front of you at the present moment. I shall be able to restore not only the money which she lost, but the jewels as well."

"And you think that will be making good to her?"

"In a measure, yes—so far as a man can."

"I understand that Lady Louisa Southworth is still unmarried."

Adair caught Harper's glance; then, going back to the window, stood looking through the grimy pane.

"Harper, I am going to be married." The man at the table continued to play with the string of shining stones; he said nothing. Presently Adair went on. "I have discovered another of the ways in which one can care for a woman."

"You are fortunate in being still at an age in which you can make discoveries."

"It seems to me that I have made my discovery rather late; yet, late or early, it's a new world which I've discovered. Don't laugh; it is."

"I'm not likely to laugh at a man who has discovered a new world; I envy him. I doubt if there's a new world for me to discover."

"I thought as you do not so very long ago, but now I'm beginning to wonder if there are not new worlds for all of us to discover. I discovered one when I knocked at the door of a house in Putney; when the door was opened I saw the new world dim on the horizon. I've been getting closer and closer to it ever since, until the other night I got there."

"I wondered what had happened; during the last few days you seem to have grown younger."

"When I've made good to Louisa Southworth I shall feel younger still. It's a comfort to think that there is at least a part of Mr. Jerningham Creed's hoards which I can with some show of honesty call mine."

"My impression is that you'll still be a rich man when you've played your quixotic game for all it's worth. I presume you don't intend to hand over to the Crown what you can't get rid of in any other way."

"I do not. There are a good many things in Creed's collection for which only a Solomon could find an owner. Take these; I suppose there's a good deal of money represented by that little lot."

Adair, opening another metal case which stood upon the table, lifted out of it three large trays crowded with a variety of articles which made John Harper's eyes glisten as he placed them in front of him.

"If these were being offered in the open market, and a bid were invited from me, I think I might safely go as far as fifty thousand golden sovereigns."

"And they lack an owner; at least what the legal mind would call an owner."

Harper was turning over what seemed to be a filigree ball studded with stones.

"Here's a very pretty thing; who's the owner of this pretty thing? There isn't a stone in all this lot that isn't worth good money. I take it that this comes from Peking, the Winter Palace—there have been a good many inroads into its treasures lately. These trifles of virtue and bigotry represent about the latest. This was once a decoration on the head of a sort of joss which was on a pedestal in the Emperor's bedroom, just over his bed.

"The figure was twelve or fourteen inches high; the whole of it was jeweled like this ball. It was broken into pieces for safe transport; you have all the component parts; they're a small fortune in themselves. You will certainly never be able to restore it to the Winter Palace; at this time of day there is no one there who has the slightest claim to it. Nor can I advise you to treat with Mr. Outerbridge and his friends; their title is such a very sketchy one, though I fancy you'll have to reckon with them if you won't treat."

"I wonder how many of them there are. I've had to reckon with half a dozen already."

"You're a brave man, Adair. Nothing is so hard to reckon with as gentlemen of their stamp who come from the Far East. I shouldn't wonder if they counted you out yet before they've done."

"I sometimes wonder. A man threw something at me the other night as I was crossing Putney Bridge. It missed me by about a quarter of an inch, struck the stonework, and went off with a bang which must have been audible for miles down the river. If that had hit me as intended, I dare say that the gentleman who threw it would have been able to drop what was left of me over the parapet into the water.

Digitized by Google

"The other morning I opened a packet which came to me through the post. It contained a small metal box. Experience has made me cautious. I only just raised the lid a fraction of an inch, then shut it down again just in time. The box contained some preparation, the fumes of which were calculated to kill in a single whiff—the suggestion of a whiff I got almost knocked me over. As you say, I sometimes wonder if Mr. Outerbridge and his friends won't gather me in before they've done."

"THEREFORE I'm not sure that under certain circumstances I shouldn't recommend you to come to some amicable arrangement."

"They want twenty thousand pounds for these—relics from Peking; you don't mean that you'd recommend me to pay it?"

"You might return the—relics to Mr. Outerbridge."

"In other words, hand back to the thieves what they have stolen."

"I tell you what—suppose you drop into the background; let me deal with Mr. Outerbridge. You've just discovered a new world—you do not want to be snuffed out because of these things." John Harper laid his hand on one of the trays. "If you don't like my proposition, let me lay the matter before certain gentlemen of my acquaintance whose characters are without stain or blemish, and let them consider it as a sort of arbitration."

"There's something in that—I don't want to be snuffed out. If Outerbridge and his friends will accept their decision——"

Adair's sentence was cut short by the sounding of an electric bell.

"The post? Or a visitor?" He looked at his watch. "I shouldn't be surprised if it's our cinematographic friend. It's about the time he appointed. I'll go and see."

"And I'll come with you; but before you go I should recommend your putting these few odds and ends away."

Laughing, Adair put back the trays into the cases and snapped them to with a noiseless spring, whose secret he had only by chance discovered.

"Here go the cases back into the safes," he said, "and we'll shut the doors so that a stranger won't even know that they're there. Hullo! There's the bell again. Whoever is outside seems to be getting a little tired of waiting."

CHAPTER XXI

MONSIEUR ROLAND

THE man who stood outside the door when Mr. Adair opened it was not, at least so far as appearance went, a very formidable personality. He was a little dapper-looking person who, the instant the door was opened, removed his hat and remained standing with it in his hand. One perceived that he was not English.

"I am Monsieur Roland, of Plantin Frères."

Adair glanced at John Harper who stood close behind him to serve as a sort of second line of defense should danger threaten; and he smiled. The idea that two men of their build were required to deal efficiently with peril which took the shape of this small gentleman was tolerably absurd. Adair opened the door much wider.

"Come in, Monsieur Roland. I have your letter. I am Martin Adair; this is my friend, John Harper. As I said, I have your letter, but as I explained in my reply, it was rather beyond my comprehension."

Mr. Adair shut the door, the visitor having advanced into the center of the room where he still stood holding his hat with both hands, smiling first at one gentleman and then at the other.

"Mr. Creed is dead?" His accent was French, but his English good.

"Mr. Creed has been dead some time. I am in possession of all that was his."

"And Mr. Latraille of Messrs. Latraille, Olgano & Company, who occupied the offices below—can you tell me what has become of him? I have been knocking but I have had no answer."

"Mr. Latraille is also dead. He and Mr. Creed died on the same night."

"Indeed, that is a curious coincidence, is it not? The firm which I represent had two or three transactions with Messrs. Latraille, Olgano & Company, and also one with Mr. Creed. Do you know if the apparatus with which we supplied him was satisfactory?"

"I am scarcely in a position to say whether the apparatus was or was not satisfactory since, to be candid, I don't even know what apparatus it was which you supplied," Adair replied.

"Is it possible? Did Mr. Creed never speak of it? No? That is strange. Do I

Digitized by Google

understand that you are Mr. Creed's representative?"

"I am his heir, Monsieur Roland; he left me everything of which he died possessed, including, I take it, the apparatus which you supplied—if I only knew what it was."

"That is quite simple; it was a cinematograph."

"A cinematograph? I'm afraid that doesn't seem to me to be so simple as it appears to you. May I ask if you have any notion what Mr. Creed proposed to do with so unusual an article?"

"That I can not tell you; but—if you'll permit me to explain as far as I am able. You are probably aware that Messieurs Plantin are perhaps the greatest dealers in the world in cinematographic appliances of all sorts and kinds. Mr. Creed wrote to us inquiring if it was possible to have a cinematograph apparatus in a private room. We told him it was quite possible, but that we should like to see the room. I came, and I saw it; it was this room."

"Why did he want it in here?"

"He explained that in this room and in the rooms adjoining he had many valuables. He said he lived here all alone—especially was he alone at night. He wanted us to make a sort of hiding-place in the wall in which could be secreted a lens which would take cinematographic pictures."

"I begin to see method in his madness. Was it you who fitted the camera in the table in the room downstairs?"

"It was. So you know about that? You have seen it. Was it any good?"

"It was good enough to take one of the most remarkable series of portraits I've ever seen. They are at present in my possession; you shall see them if you like. But what about the cinematograph?"

"The idea was that, as with the camera, it should take pictures without the person or persons concerned knowing anything about it—only of course in this case the matter was not so simple. The camera was to take portraits in the daylight; the cinematograph at night.

"It was to be set in action by a sort of burglar alarm. Any one forcing his way into the room, either by the window or the door, was to set the machinery in motion the moment he set foot in the room. But pictures can not be taken in darkness. Our idea was that the instant the machinery was set in motion a light was to be switched on.

"By that light a complete series of pictures would be taken of the room, of any person or persons who might be in it, of everything that was done—so that if, we will say, a burglary took place in this apartment, a complete pictorial record of the whole incident would be left."

"Did you fit up this ingenious apparatus, Monsieur Roland?"

"We did."

"Where did you fix the thing?"

"There, in that wall; almost exactly, I should say, where I am pointing."

Martin Adair and John Harper, following the direction of the pointing finger with their eyes, saw nothing—except the wall. Adair admitted as much.

"I have never noticed anything unusual about that wall, and I see nothing unusual now."

"You perceive that there is a bookcase there, and a bookcase there. Between them are four pegs. Below those pegs there is a shelf on which, at present, there are papers—all littered. The lens is behind those papers, in accordance with Mr. Creed's instructions. He said that he would take care that every night an empty space should be left between those papers so that the lens should not be screened. Perhaps you have put the papers as they are."

"I dare say; I have taken papers on and off that shelf perhaps a score of times."

"Since Mr. Creed died?"

"Certainly; I never touched a thing upon that shelf before he died."

"Then that explains. Probably every night while he was still living there was a vacant space upon that shelf through which the lens could see."

"Then in that case——"

Mr. Adair stopped; exchanging glances with John Harper he showed signs of being unusually moved, for him.

"It occurs to me, Mr. Roland, that we're going to stumble upon what may turn out to be the most curious part of a very curious business. You didn't know that Mr. Creed was dead till you had my reply to your note?"

"I did not; I heard it with surprise. When did he die?"

"Early on the morning of the thirteenth of May."

"Then that makes it stranger still. The business of fixing the lens was only finished on the seventh of May. Of what did he die?"

Digitized by Google

"He was murdered, Monsieur Roland."

"Murdered! It is not possible! Mr. Creed was murdered—in this room? In this room in which we are?"

The little man had risen from his seat in a state of agitation.

"Mr. Creed was murdered in this room early on the morning of the thirteenth of May."

"Who murdered him?"

"That no one has discovered; the police have failed to find even so much as a clue."

"Then—if that is the case—do you not perceive? The cinematograph, Mr. Adair! If Mr. Creed was murdered in this room early in the morning—then may not the whole story be on the cinematograph?"

"Do you think that is possible?"

"POSSIBLE? Of course it is possible. It is even probable—my word, yes! Permit that I explain. Some one comes through the window—he gets on to the floor here." Mr. Roland had moved to the window for the purpose of illustrating his words with actions. "The moment he opens the window a current of electricity is set in motion which lights a lamp—which sets the cinematographic machinery in motion. There is the lens, looking right at him. It takes in the whole room, not a point is hidden, not a part of it escapes it. Suppose Mr. Creed comes from his own apartments—because an electric bell has been rung which is just over his bed; his private apartments were through that door."

"They were; and the presumption is that he was disturbed from sleep and did come through that door in his night-shirt."

"Good! Then you have the picture! Everything they do is recorded, every movement of their fingers.

"If it was the man who came through the window, or perhaps through the door—he may have forced his way through that; for all practical purposes it is the same thing—if that man killed Mr. Creed it is on the cinematograph. We have only to develop the film, which is nothing, we have the whole crime—every detail in all its completeness—for ever and ever.

"My dear Mr. Adair, you'll excuse me, but if that is on the film, as the representative of Plantin Frères there is practically no sum, I tell you, which we will not give you for that film. There is not a town, not a village, in the whole world which would not pay for the right to use it.

"Mon Dieu! A real murder, the whole story, told under such circumstances on a cinematographic film—that will be the greatest thing the trade has ever seen."

CHAPTER XXII

WHAT THEY SAID TO EACH OTHER

MARTIN ADAIR spent an evening with Mr. and Mrs. Bishop Guy, with whom Miss Dennis was stopping in Redcliffe Mansions. There was a doctor who lived not very far from the Dovecote. Mr. Adair had gone out and fetched him; he was bending over the patent bedstead in the back room within ten minutes of the girl's having informed the lodger that her mother was dead. Miss Dennis was right; the broken life was ended.

In the morning Mrs. Bishop Guy came, remaining an inmate of the Dovecote until, two days afterward, Mrs. Dennis was buried. Then Miss Dennis went to stay with her at Redcliffe Gardens; the Dovecote was shut up; Martin Adair took rooms at the Colossus Hotel, hobnobbing with his friend John Harper, and paying frequent visits to the small flat which was in the street off the Fulham Road.

On the evening to which reference has been made Mr. Adair dined in the flat, and afterward found himself in his hostess's own tiny sitting-room, alone with Miss Dennis. Matters between them were not quite on the footing the gentleman would have liked. The girl was very far from well. Her mother's death, coming on the top of so many other trials and troubles, had been the final straw. She had attended the funeral, although she had to get out of bed to do so; when she returned from the cemetery she went straight back to bed, and there she stayed for three days. When she rose, and Mr. Adair was able to see her again, she seemed to him to have been reduced almost to half her size.

"Is she in a decline?" he demanded of Mrs. Bishop Guy. "Oughtn't she to see the doctor? She seems to me to be actually ill."

"My dear Mr. Adair, I do not think that it's absolutely necessary that she should see a doctor. Of course if you wish to send for one of the big guns from Harley Street, do so. Money is nothing to you, and even a

Digitized by Google

great physician, I imagine, is glad to get his fee; but the trouble is that I don't fancy Winnie will see him even if he comes—so what will be the use?"

"If Winnie is ill then she ought to have a doctor. It's not a question of whether she will see him; she's got to."

When the proposition was made to Miss Dennis, that young lady took up the attitude which her friend had foretold.

"Thank you; I'm perfectly well. I don't want to see a doctor; if one came I wouldn't see him; he wouldn't do me the least good. my physical health is all right; I'm only worrying a little as to the best way in which I can earn my daily bread. I don't see how I can go back to the Dovecote and keep on letting lodgings."

Mr. Adair, to whom this remark was addressed, said nothing. He had heard others very like it before, and was to hear them again. That night—to which we once more return—he had gone to Redcliffe Mansions with the express intention of having it out with the young lady as soon as dinner was ended. It was with Mrs. Bishop Guy's connivance that he was alone with her in that tiny sitting-room.

The girl had gone in there to write a letter. Mr. Adair, following, had found her with her face on her hands, in an attitude which, since her eyes were covered, scarcely suggested writing letters. When the door opened she suddenly sat up, and having glanced around, applied a handkerchief for some suspicious purpose to her eyes.

"I'm very sorry," she murmured, "but I'm engaged."

"Yes, you are; you're engaged to me."

That this was hardly the answer she had expected was suggested by the spot of color which flamed on either cheek.

"You're not to talk to me like that."

The voice in which she spoke might still be described as a murmur; she seemed to be incapable of raising it.

"Nor are you to talk to me like that."

Mr. Adair, standing before the minute fireplace, whose size was in keeping with the rest of the apartment, seemed to dominate the whole room; a fact of which the girl seemed to be uncomfortably conscious.

"I—I wish you'd go; I—I've got to write some letters."

The gentleman ignored what distinctly amounted to an appeal.

"You're treating me with a cruelty of which I had not supposed you capable; it is no consolation to me to know that you are treating yourself just as cruelly."

"What—what do you mean by that? I—I'm not fit to talk just now."

"I love you. I have loved you since the moment when I first saw you standing in the doorway of the Dovecote; I have reason to believe that you love me. To you love may mean nothing——"

"You have no right to say that."

"To me love means a very great deal; therefore I wish you to fix a date on which you will become my wife."

"With my mother only just dead?"

"If Mrs. Dennis were alive she would urge you to do as I wish, as you are very well aware. If she can hear us now I am sure that her prayer to you would be mine—that you also know. Don't try to confuse the situation with sophistries; it's unworthy of you, Winnie. There is no reason whatever why you and I should not be married next week."

"Next week!" The girl's face was all aflame. "I sometimes wonder if——"

The girl paused.

"If—what?" he asked.

"If you are mad."

"My dear Winnie, you don't deceive me, and I doubt if you deceive yourself; you don't wonder anything of the kind. What reason is there why we should not be married next week?"

"What reason is there why we should? Why, I don't even know who you are." She spoke with sudden passion. "I can't help it; I wouldn't say a word about it, I don't want to say a word, only—you keep on talking and you don't explain. Can't you understand that a girl doesn't want to marry a man about whom she knows absolutely nothing at all, even if he is a millionaire? And then some girls would like to know how he got his millions."

"I see; it's like that. Now the cat is beginning to peep out of the bag." The quizzical smile with which he looked down at her seemed to increase her warmth.

"I am quite aware, as well aware as you can possibly be, that for a person in my position to show the slightest curiosity about a person in yours may be presumption; but when that person persists in talking as you do then I think there are one or two elementary facts about which I am entitled to ask questions."

Digitized by Google

"And pray what may those facts be? What do you want to know?"

"You may laugh at me, but under the circumstances I really don't think that you're entitled to."

"I'm not laughing, or if I am it's only on the surface. Within I'm gravity itself. Ask on."

"I WILL. In the first place, is your name Adair?"

"I was not born Adair."

"Then—" the girl drew a long breath—"I never heard of such a thing! Did you propose to marry me as Martin Adair?"

"I did not; I proposed to do nothing of the kind."

"Then what did you propose to marry me as, if—as you kindly suggest—you did propose to marry me?"

"Oh, yes; I did propose to marry you. I propose to marry you now. That's the one aim and object of my existence."

"Is it? That's very good of you. And how long after we were married would you have been likely to think it expedient to inform me that your name was Jones or Brown?"

"I should never have been likely to think that expedient, because my name isn't Jones or Brown. My name is Maurice Ashurst."

"Then—what that man said was true!"

"Do you mean when he said that I was a forger?"

"Of course I don't mean that! How dare you suggest that I mean anything of the sort?"

"I am suggesting nothing; I am only trying to arrive at facts."

"I mean that what he said was true, and that you are the son of the Marquis of Staines."

"I am. I really don't see on what grounds either of logic or common sense you are justified in blaming me for that."

"And you pretend to think that I'm the proper sort of person to become your wife—I, the girl who let you lodgings, who cleaned your boots, who washed and scrubbed and cooked for you——"

"Don't throw that in my face; it's not fair."

"To whom you lent money, whose brother is a thief, who was engaged to a man who is a still greater thief——"

"That I don't believe. You never were engaged to him. I almost killed him for hinting that you were."

"I never was exactly engaged to him; but Charlie was in his power, and they both kept urging me—they would never let me alone. And—when Mr. Ray said he was the only person who could keep my brother out of the hands of the police I—I don't know what I did say; but I always hated him, always, always! I couldn't bear to be in the same room, in the same house with him! All the same I nearly was engaged to him, and I'm not fit to be anybody's wife—especially the wife of the son of the Marquis of Staines."

"I am of a different opinion; I consider you to be the ideal wife for the son of the Marquis of Staines, and I occupy a position in which my opinion ought to have some weight. I have been in deeper waters than you. When I was a young man I was a fool; I lived in an atmosphere of debt and extravagance. When I began to understand why it was that my mother always looked so pale and seemed so sad it was already too late; like my father and my brother, I owed money which I could not pay. They were on the brink of ruin."

The speaker paused. When he continued his tone had grown a little harder.

"I am telling you these things because you are about to be my wife; and experience has taught me that there is something in the old-fashioned notion that husbands and wives ought to bare their breasts to each other. But you will understand presently why I preferred to keep my own counsel. If I had known what awaited me at the Dovecote, I would have told you the whole truth right straight away that first afternoon. But how could I tell, when I knocked at your door, that the girl who would open would be my wife?"

"You needn't be so sure that she will be your wife."

"I have been told that where a woman is concerned one should be sure of nothing; but I am sure of you. I fancy that every man is sure of one woman; you are the woman of whom I am sure."

"You are not justified in saying anything of the kind. You don't know in the very least what kind of person I really am."

"Don't I? We'll leave that for the moment; we'll continue to deal with the elementary facts on which you desire information. Just as I was beginning to realize that

Digitized by Google

ruin was somewhere in the air, without the slightest warning so far as I was concerned, it was on us with the force of an earthquake shock, and I was, as it were, submerged in the fissures which opened in the ground."

"Wasn't there——" Miss Dennis was writing imaginary letters on a blotting-pad with the point of an inkless pen. "Wasn't there—a girl—of whom you were fond?"

There was a perceptible interval before he answered.

"You've heard that story? It depends on your definition of the word 'fond.' There was a girl who had some money which I was given to understand might avert the impending ruin, of whom I was fond in a way, and am fond still—but not in the way in which I'm fond of you. You—in a way, you seem to have become part of my life."

"That's ridiculous!"

"I suppose you've heard that the girl went down with us; she was involved in our ruin. Possibly, also, you've heard what was the immediate cause of the disaster. Here I speak to you in confidence, as a man speaks to his wife. If you are not prepared to respect my confidence as if you were my wife I had better keep still. Does silence imply consent?"

She was still writing imaginary letters; her face was toward the blotting-pad, her voice scarcely rose above a whisper.

"Whatever you say to me will never be repeated to any one else."

He waited, as if to grasp the full meaning of her words; then, with a smile, went on:

"You have said enough. Thank you; I'll make you my confessor. Money was obtained on deeds which proved to be forged to the extent of some thirty-seven thousand pounds; I give you the approximate figures—I never knew them exactly. The question arose, who was the forger? I thought it better, for various reasons, to let it be supposed that I was. But I was not."

She raised her head and turned to look at him.

"Of that I am certain."

"Thank you. Lady Louisa Southworth was the name of the girl to whom you refer. When a prosecution was threatened the whole of her fortune was used to ward it off. I—ran. It was absolutely necessary that some one should run—so I did. When afterward the final crash came, people said that it was caused by me. They were wrong."

"Of that also I am sure."

The girl and the man were looking each other very straight in the eyes.

"You see how well we understand each other. I went abroad, to North and South America. Like the scapegoat I wandered in the wilderness. I tried to keep myself alive by the labor of my hands. One thing I have learned—that for a man brought up as I had been that is almost impossible.

"If I had had luck perhaps I might have succeeded, but I had none. One of the best jobs I got was that of clerk in a second-rate San Francisco hotel. One day an Englishman walked in with whom I had had some dealings on the turf, and to whom I still owed money. Not unnaturally he resented my appearance.

"He made certain statements to the management, and I was fired; that is, I was turned out on to the sidewalk there and then, with a few clothes in my gripsack and a few dollars in my pocket.

"Then I got a job on an Argentine ranch —no matter how I got there; I did. Things went tolerably well for another year. Then the boss, my employer, being pretty full of drink, made himself ugly to a woman who came to me for assistance. In the discussion which followed he put a bullet into my thigh, and I knocked him down. For nearly six months I was dead lame; it was longer before he recovered from what I had given him."

"It is a pity, perhaps, that he ever recovered at all."

There was fire in the lady's eyes.

"I RESUMED my wanderings. I got over on to the Pacific coast and was a beachcomber on some of the islands. A beachcomber is a man who is supposed to comb the beach, looking for gold and silver; a pretty helpless, useless, rotten sort of a creature. Later I tried Australia, then came home.

"I had two pounds fifteen in my pocket when I returned to England. I don't want to tell you the depths to which I sank, because there are some things a man wants to hide, even from his wife. But I did get down pretty low. I got into the habit of spending a good many nights on the Embankment, where there is the cheapest lodging to be had in town; and there I met Jerningham Creed, who thought I had done him a service. And to show his

Digitized by Google

gratitude—which was a thing I had never encountered before—he gave me a post in his office. With him I stayed as clerk until he died."

"What Jerningham Creed was that? Not—not the man who lent me money?"

"The same. He was found dead one morning in his office. Now there's a question which I want to ask of you; can you guess what it is?"

The girl seemed to have drawn herself into a smaller compass. The light which had been glowing in her eyes had faded; all at once the look of trouble, which to him was too familiar, had returned to her face.

"No, I have no idea. How can I guess what question you want to ask me?"

"That afternoon when you opened the door to me at the Dovecote was not the first time I had seen you."

"What do you mean? Do you mean——? Where had you seen me before?"

"I saw you coming down the staircase of the chambers in which Jerningham Creed lived, early on the morning of Wednesday, the thirteenth of May. A few hours afterward he was found dead on the office floor."

The girl's face had changed; she sat staring at him as at some dreadful specter.

"Do you mean——? I don't understand. Where were you when you saw me?"

"I was in the court without. As I passed I saw that the door was open, and I saw a woman coming down the staircase. I drew back. She went running past, without noticing that I was there, out into Fleet Street. When you opened the door to me at the Dovecote I recognized you as the woman who had come down old Creed's staircase."

"But what, at that hour, were you doing in Mitre Court?"

"I had acquired the habit of insomnia; I could not sleep at night. It isn't nice to have to lie between the dirty sheets of a dirty bed in a dirty room struggling for the sleep which would not come.

"I got very little exercise in the daytime. Sometimes, growing desperate, I would get out of bed and take exercise in the middle of the night. That was one of my nights. I wandered toward Mitre Court, I don't know why—because I did! And that's how I came to be there. But you—you must excuse my asking the question in my turn—how did you come to be there?"

"Did you say—that that morning—Mr. Creed—was found dead—on the floor of his office?"

"He must have been murdered within a few minutes of your being on that staircase."

The girl seemed to collapse; all the bone and muscle seemed to go out of her.

"You don't think—you can't think——"

He broke into her halting sentence.

"You can't be so absurd as to imagine that I think you had anything to do with old Creed's death. But you must see that that was an unusual hour for a lady to visit a staircase in Mitre Court."

"I'll tell you how it was; then—then perhaps you'll understand." She put up her hand to brush her hair back from her temple. "You know I owed Mr. Creed money. I was behind in my payments—according to him I always was. I had had an intimation from him that morning that if I didn't let him have some money in the course of the day, by eight o'clock the next morning he'd have my furniture taken away.

"I was in a dreadful state of mind. There was mother—I was always so afraid of what would become of her if they took all the furniture. I had only a few shillings in the house. Then quite late I decided to do something which I had always fought against before. I decided to raise money on my mother's watch and chain, her pearl brooch, and—other things of hers; all the jewelry she had left.

"I went to a pawnbroker's in the North End Road. I got there just as they were closing. They lent me six pounds ten. I wanted fifteen pounds—I believe they were worth it; but they wouldn't lend me more than six pounds ten. I took it, but when I got out into the street I told myself that that was no use. Mr. Creed had said in his letter that he must have at least fifteen pounds, so what was the good of six pounds ten? So I went back home."

"What time was that?"

"It was nearly midnight when I got into the house; I had walked all the way. Mother was all right; I was always so frightened when I was out of the house that something would happen to her. Nothing had; she was just as usual. Then as I looked at her my fear of what Mr. Creed would do came back. Six pounds ten, after all, was something. If I gave him that, with some sort of explanation, it might stave him off for a day or two. It was too late for the

Digitized by Google

post. I sat down and I scribbled a letter, and I put it and the six pounds ten in an envelope, and I went with it to Mitre Court."

"Again walking all the way?"

"I had to; there was no other means of getting there."

"It must be a good seven miles from the Dovecote to Mitre Court."

"I dare say. I don't know—I didn't notice the distance. I walked as fast as I could. I got there and I went up the stairs, and I felt for the envelope—my intention was to slip it through the letter-box so that he might find it the first thing in the morning, before he gave orders to have my things taken away. I had no pocket; I had put the envelope inside my bodice and covered it up safely. When I felt for it it wasn't there.

"The bodice in some way had come unbottoned—in my haste I hadn't noticed it. I suppose the envelope had fallen out upon the road. When I found that it wasn't there it was all I could do to keep from screaming. It seemed—it seemed as if all at once something had happened to the world, and everything was over. I believe I nearly fainted. I know that I found myself standing close up to the wall, shivering and trembling and crying; because—it was such a tragedy for me. It was all dark—there was not a sound; suddenly I was afraid. Then——"

The girl stopped, as if incapable for the moment of further articulate speech. The man watching her made a forward movement—which she checked by putting up her hand. Her power of speech returned.

"Don't come near me—please! I want to make you understand. Where was I? Oh, yes; I know. I was saying that all in an instant I—I became a coward; some dreadful, unreasonable terror had all at once come over me. Then—then—while I was trying to tell myself that I had no cause to be afraid, there came a sound from the other side of Mr. Creed's door—a whirring, whizzing sound.

"It was so—so unexpected. I did not ask myself what it could mean. I ran down the staircase, out into the street, and I believe I ran all the way home. I was in a dreadful state when I got home. I could hardly take my clothes off. When I woke in the morning I found myself in bed without being properly undressed—I hadn't done my hair or anything.

"The first thing I heard was the whirring, whizzing sound—of course it was only imagination, but I kept hearing it for days."

CHAPTER XXIII

ON HIS WAY HOME

THE girl ceased, and the man was still. He stood watching her with a look in his eyes which must have moved her had she seen it. Presently she asked in a tremulous voice:

"And you say he was found dead—Mr. Creed—that morning? Murdered on his office floor? That same morning?"

"I think he was probably being murdered as you were standing on the landing outside his office door."

"Oh-h-h-h!" It was a long-drawn-out exclamation.

"The noise you heard was the mechanism of a cinematographic apparatus set suddenly in motion."

"What can you mean?"

"Creed had had a machine fitted in a receptacle in the wall of his office—the ordinary cinematograph of commerce. There is reason to believe that while you stood outside the door some one had effected a burglarious entrance through a window—it looks as if he had entered at the very moment you were standing there, because directly the window was raised the cinematograph was automatically set in motion.

"What you heard was probably the whirring of the shutter of the lens, and the unwinding of the reels as the film passed from one to the other, to say nothing of the machinery which set the whole thing in motion, and, of course, in the intense silence and darkness the slightest sound was magnified."

"But I don't understand! What was the cinematograph doing?"

"The theory is that it was making a record of what was happening in that room on the other side of that door—giving a pictorial history of every detail."

"Then do you mean that it will show who murdered Mr. Creed?"

"Precisely; you've got it exactly. The man Ray suggested that I had had a finger in the business. That film will show if I had or not. You can take it from me that it won't show you. It couldn't see you on the other side of that door.

"You see how this little conversation of

Digitized by Google

ours is clearing the air, and how explanation is bringing us closer together. I love you, if the thing were possible, even more than I did, when I think of the white-faced, wild-eyed girl fleeing along the street on rapid feet, the envelope hidden in her bodice, then climbing the pitch black stairs—it was pretty dark in the court outside—then feeling for the envelope and finding it wasn't there. Oh, my dear, if you know how I longed to take you in my arms and comfort you—for the pity of it! And I will before very long. There is that comforting reflection."

"Please—please don't talk like that, you mustn't. Is it true that Mr. Creed left you all his money?"

"He did; why, goodness only knows. There are those who say he knew—I don't. He has left me also one of the finest collections of stolen property ever gathered together by one collector. I am finding out the owners and returning it as fast as I can. But even when all is returned that can be there will still be a comfortable sum left which I hope I shall be able honestly to call mine—and my wife's."

These last three words he added apparently on the spur of the moment.

"Don't you see how every word you say makes it more impossible that I should ever be your wife? You not only belong to a station to which I don't, and therefore have relations who would look at me askance, but you are rich—I understand immensely rich. And I am poor—so poor that I owe the very food I am eating to your benevolence.

"The thought stifles me. I want to get out into the world and at least earn my own daily bread. You don't want me to marry you because I owe you money—money which I can't pay. And then there's Charlie; I don't know what he's doing. Suppose they arrest him and he is sent to jail. How nice it will be for you and for your friends to know that your wife's brother is in prison, a convicted felon!"

The girl had risen from her chair; her tremulousness had gone, she was all heat and eagerness. He, when he spoke, was as cool as she was warm.

"I never have concealed from myself the fact that one of the greatest of your gifts is the gift of eloquence; I have always been afraid to match my powers in that direction against yours. I won't argue; please the Fates I never will. I am content with facts—two facts. The one is that I love you, and the other that you love me. Don't you love me?"

"That's not the question. You don't want to enter into a marriage of middle-class affection."

"And pray what may middle-class affection be? It sounds as if it were something funny."

"You mustn't laugh at me; it isn't fair! I mayn't be able to express myself very clearly, but you know what I mean. You ought to make a great marriage."

"A great marriage? Yes, that's what I'm going to do."

"I mean you ought to marry a person in your own rank of life—one who would do you credit. According to your own statement your family fortunes need to be raised, not lowered. Do your duty to your family. You'll soon forget me. How about the girl who—who lost all her money?"

"Are you about to suggest that I should marry her? If you are, save yourself the trouble. I have told myself many a time that I would never marry—I made a vow which I am going to break. I will not break a second. I have vowed that I will marry you and I will. I ask you to help me to keep that vow.

"So shall we say that the marriage shall take place next week? Pray understand that it is not my desire to be unreasonable over much. Should next week be inconvenient, you'll find that your convenience is a thing which I am particularly anxious to consult."

The girl sat down on her chair again, turned to the table, and set to tracing on the blotting pad imaginary letters.

"It doesn't seem to be the slightest use to talk to you. Is it impossible to get a man to listen to reason?"

"I dreamed last night that I kissed you; I woke up all of a tremor."

"I wish—I wish you wouldn't talk about such things."

"Just say you love me; that's all."

"It doesn't seem necessary that I should say so. You—you do so take things for granted."

He moved a little from the fireplace; this time she did not check him.

When shortly afterward there came a knocking at the door and—it being opened

Digitized by Google

about two inches—Mrs. Bishop Guy's voice came through, he was still close to the girl's chair.

"May I come in?" The lady entered. "Augustus wants you to come in and make a four at bridge. He would like one before he goes to bed, and it's getting pretty late."

They went into the other room where they found that Mr. Bishop Guy was waiting. As they were taking their seats at the table Mr. Adair said:

"And how goes the New Silk, and the Lock Fastener?"

"Matters are being pushed on as fast as they possibly can. The New Silk will be on the market next month, and the Fastener, which requires special machinery, directly afterward. Contracts have been made for advertisement; the trade has been sounded; conditional orders have already been booked which will keep us going for twelve months. In two—three—four years, you will find yourself, Mr. Adair, a prince of commerce."

"And you a king?"

"No, no, I sha'n't be a king. I have no ambition in that direction. But I shall be in possession of a rattling good income, and I shall be able to afford my wife an occasional pair of shoes."

"By then I shall have a wife, who will also probably be in want of an occasional pair of shoes." They were cutting for the deal; he turned the three of spades. "I think I deal."

"I wonder if it would be too much to ask, Mr. Adair, if you already have a lady in mind?"

Just then Miss Dennis faced the deuce.

"She's turned the two. I refer you to the dealer."

"Don't you think," remarked Mrs. Bishop Guy with an air of severity, "that you might leave business alone, just for once in a way?" Then with twinkling eyes she added, "And marriage is the most serious business in the world."

IT WAS nearly one o'clock when Mr. Adair left Redcliffe Mansions, having played a little bridge, and discussed a great many things with his host and his hostess and one or two trifles with Miss Dennis. Just as he was going Mr. Bishop Guy vanished from the room, and an instant later his wife went after him. So Mr. Adair was alone with Miss Dennis.

"Those are two very thoughtful people"

Mr. Adair spoke with an air of meaning just what he said and no more; but the girl seemed confused.

"It isn't fair of Ella to—to go like that."

"Good night."

Mr. Adair was standing by the chair on which the girl was seated. She held out her hand to him.

"Won't you stand up to say good night?"

So—as if without intending to move—she stood up. He took her in his arms—and good night was said.

When he reached the street he paused for a moment to light a cigar. The pavements seemed deserted; his quick eye caught sight of a figure which slunk into a doorway two houses from that i front of which he stood. He lighted his cigar with particular care.

"I wonder who you are. Recent events have made me so suspicious that I'm always wondering. I think I'll pass your way and have a look at you."

He went along the pavement with great strides, and as he neared the doorway which the figure had entered he tightened his grip on the malacca cane which he was carrying. When he was abreast of it he slackened his pace. Some one was standing as far back as was possible.

Mr. Adair paused. Not a word was spoken. The man—it was a man—darting out, threw something in his face; apparently a paper bag whose construction was so delicate that it burst of its own volition as it passed through the air. Some sort of powder which had a peculiarly pungent odor came out of the burst bag straight at Adair's face.

The moment he saw the man's hand raised he leaped back to one side and ducked. Swift though his movement was, some of the powder touched his cheek, seeming to scorch the skin.

He leaped away, striking at his assailant as he did so. The full force of his blow was lost, but part of it got home. The man gave a sort of squeal and went flying down the pavement. Adair stood up. His cheek seemed to be on fire.

"He's marked me with that pretty stuff of his. My word, how it hurts!"

He staggered rather than moved backward, off the curb into the roadway. Although only a few grains of the powder could have touched him they had inflicted excruciating pain. He knit his brow,

Digitized by Google

tightened his lips, gritted his teeth; it was not easy to keep from exclaiming. A faint whistle was heard, so faint that it was only just audible. It was not the first time it had saluted his ears. Its import was familiar.

"There's some one else coming. Confound this cheek of mine! It hurts so that it's hard to keep myself all there. I'd better be moving, if I can."

Turning, he strode along the roadway, keeping as near to the center as he could —moving a little unsteadily, as a man might do who is feeling a trifle dazed. It seemed that out of all the doorways on both sides of the street figures appeared.

"What an ass I was not to bring a gun! There's going to be trouble. There's only one thing I can do, and that is make a dash for it—if I can dash." He broke into a run, making straight for a man who was in front of him. "All right, my friend—at least I'll deal with you."

But the man did not wait. As Mr. Adair approached he swerved to one side, bent almost double, threw something and went flying past him. Another paper packet of powder burst in the air. At least a few grains reached Adair.

Without pause he tore on. Figures on either side of the road were closing in on him. He caught one man with his malacca cane on the shoulder; the man went down on to the road. The others discharged their packets of powder.

Tiny, invisible particles of what appeared to be dust seemed to fill the air. It was impossible to avoid them all. He tore blindly on, striking at them as he went. Had he stumbled, in all probability that would have been the end of him. He would not have risen again—they would have finished with him as he lay upon the road. But he managed not to stumble.

He struck at them frantically. Some of his blows got home; yet they hung on to him—other packets were thrown. He staggered, reeled, was falling, when the whistle was heard again. As it seemed, by magic, his assailants vanished.

Some one was coming toward him along the pavement with great, clumsy steps. A voice hailed him.

"Here, what's all this? Who are all of those chaps? What were they trying to do to you, sir?"

"Thank God!" cried Mr. Adair. "You're a policeman!"

Had not the blue-coated figure put a protecting arm about him he would have fallen to the ground.

"Here!" exclaimed the guardian of the night. "What's wrong? What have they done to you, sir?—I do believe he's fainted."

CHAPTER XXIV

IN DEFIANCE OF ORDERS

MR. ADAIR looked up at John Harper, who was standing by his bed.

"Well—are you admiring the picture I present?"

Grim as was Mr. Harper's face when he replied, his tone was even grimmer.

"At this moment I certainly am not. To begin with, there is very little of you to be seen. Your face is nearly all lint and bandages; I can see the whole of one eye and part of the other. It occurs to me that you are paying pretty dearly for the fortune left you by Mr. Jerningham Creed."

"I am, and that's a fact. They very nearly had me this time; I shouldn't wonder if next time they had me quite."

"Nor I—which is a pleasant prospect for you. The doctor tells me that in all probability they have marked your face forever. That's another comforting reflection."

"I don't suppose it will improve my beauty; but—between ourselves, Harper, I haven't much belief in what doctors say. I'm a man with nine lives; although I've lost four or five of them I have still a few in hand. In a few months or even weeks, I shouldn't be a bit surprised if I were as beautiful as ever, in spite of all the doctor says. At the same time I can't help feeling —we'll say a trifle anxious—about what may happen the next time they have a go at me. I shall be glad when that arbitration committee of yours has given its award."

"They've given it. That's what I've come to see you about; it's in my pocket."

"That's you all over. You stand there cheering me up by unpleasant allusions to my personal appearance while somewhere on you is the prescription which may—or may not—do me all the good in the world. Take that award out of your pocket and let me hear what it is."

John Harper produced a pocketbook; and from the pocketbook a paper, explaining its import as he unfolded it.

Digitized by Google

"You know who the members of the committee were and what was the question they had to consider. I got seven men of the highest commercial integrity, citizens of different countries, and submitted to them this question—or perhaps I ought to call it a problem."

Mr. Harper looked over the top of the paper at the nearly shrouded face which was turned up toward him on the pillow.

"Certain articles were taken from the Winter Palace in Pekin under circumstances which are not altogether clear and with which we, at any rate, are unfamiliar. We are not certain even by whom they were taken. When we first heard of them they were in the hands of what we will call a syndicate of Chinese adventurers, represented by an individual whom we will call Brown.

"Brown offered them to Jones at a certain price—no doubt less than they would fetch in the ordinary way in the open market, but still a good price. Jones agreed to pay that price; but before it was paid he died, leaving these articles to Smith, his heir.

"The question is, what ought Smith to do? Ought he to return the articles to Brown, representing the Chinese syndicate, or pay him the price agreed by Jones, or hand the property over to the Crown or to the police, or try to find the original owners in Pekin? It may be remarked that the attempt to do the latter would be a very expensive, troublesome and lengthy process, and would almost inevitably result in failure.

"It may also be observed that it does not appear that the Crown or police of any one country have any more claim to the goods than the Crown or police of any other country; nor is it easy to perceive what good would be gained by handing them over to either of those authorities. It may be added that Smith, the present holder, is a gentleman and a man of honor; he desires to be advised as to what to do with the goods."

"That last sentence is a triumph, Harper—the allusion to Smith as being a gentleman and a man of honor. As Smith, allow me to thank you very much."

"That, as I have said, is baldly the proposition which I placed before them."

"I was already aware of that; you needn't be more explicit."

"Although expressing themselves in different ways, the members of the committee are all of the same opinion. First of all: as to general principles, they are agreed that it is a position in which Smith is entitled to do exactly as he pleases. They consider—that's the particular point—that Smith's wisest course of action would be to hand over the amount agreed by Jones to Brown as the representative of the Chinese syndicate.

"Each member of the committee emphatically states that that is what he would do; each man Jack of them regards himself as much a gentleman, and of as nice a sense of honor as Smith or anybody else. There is the award for you; I am bound to state that it is one with which I am wholly in sympathy."

"In other words, I'm to hand over twenty thousand pounds to Outerbridge and consider the plunder from Pekin as mine; that's what it comes to."

"And a very sensible conclusion at which to arrive. You can have the broken pieces of that joss thing soldered together and placed over your own bed instead of the Chinese Emperor's."

"You think it would be safe there? That Chinese syndicate would leave it alone?"

"Adair!" There was a quizzical expression on Harper's face as he spoke. "If those gentlemen have not what you and I would call a 'nice sense of honor,' they have at least a standard of honor of their own. If you paid them their money I do honestly believe that they would leave you the goods. While you persist in not paying the money and sticking to the goods, it seems to me to be only human nature that—well, you know what!"

"That they should throw packets of some infernal and ingenious and murderous variety of corrosive sublimate at the face and person of the high-minded Smith."

"It may appear to them to be the only way of bringing him to a proper sense of the situation. I've been thinking, Adair. Ask the enterprising Mr. Outerbridge, and such of his clients as choose to attend, to a little function; hand over the twenty thousand pounds, get his receipt, and—present the company with a little entertainment."

"Wouldn't the twenty thousand pounds be entertainment enough?"

"There's a line from Paris to say that that cinematographic film has been developed,

Digitized by Google

and that Monsieur Roland is waiting for your instructions to come over and give you ocular demonstration of what a remarkable film it is. Messieurs Plantin Frères add that they are willing to treat with you for the right to produce copies of the film on the most liberal terms, and that Monsieur Roland has full powers to act on their behalf —that seems to suggest that the film is, at any rate, not a very bad one.

"What do you say to entertaining Outerbridge and his clients with a display of that film upon a screen? Don't you think they might find that amusing?"

"You believe, then, that they were concerned in the matter?"

"That I don't pretend to say. If they were they ought to find it more amusing still. We shall know more about that when Monsieur Roland comes to town; my one idea was to offer them entertainment. I will leave you to consider the matter at your leisure. I am sorry to say I must go. I am a man of affairs who has sometimes to keep his appointments. There is another point which I might mention before I go; a lady has been to see you."

"A lady? Harper! What lady?"

Mr. Adair showed more signs of interest than he had hitherto evinced.

"She gave her name as Mrs. Bishop Guy. She wanted to come upstairs; when I told her you were resting and were not to be disturbed she developed distinct symptoms of what I should call huffiness.

"She was small in size, but in another direction she was large. I have an uncomfortable feeling that she would have proved too big for me if she had insisted upon seeing you. Fortunately she concluded that it wasn't worth her while to make a meal of me. The doctor distinctly said that no women were to be allowed to come near you."

"I can't see a woman while I'm like this, quite apart from the doctor—I must look awful! The sight of me would make any woman ill."

"It's not quite so bad as that; some women could look at you without being utterly upset. Anyhow, the doctor seems to think that Heaven only knows when your appearance will improve. It's your nervous state I'm thinking about; a woman might wreck it. No woman is to come into this room . . . Who's there? Why don't you knock? What in thunder——"

JOHN HARPER did not finish his speech because his surprise seemed to be too much for him. Without warning having been given of any one being on the other side, the handle was turned, the door was opened, and in the aperture stood a girl.

"Is this Mr. Adair's room?" she inquired. She answered her own question. "I see it is." Then she moved right in, toward the bed. She addressed its inmate.

"I'm very glad," she said, "to see that you're still alive."

When she turned to look around John Harper was not there; he had slipped out as she slipped in. Perhaps it was because he was not there that she moved a little closer toward the bed—and a little choking sound came from her throat.

"Oh, my dear!" The words were gasped rather than spoken. As she stood looking down at him tears came into her eyes. "What has happened?"

"The chief thing that has happened is that you have called me dear—your dear." His own voice was a little shaky.

After she had looked at him speechless for some moments longer, a wave of emotion seemed to sweep over her so that she sank on her knees by the bed.

"Oh, Martin," she cried, "what have they done to you? Why didn't you let me know that something was wrong?"

"In the first place I was rather shy about your coming to see me. I was an awful sight."

"As if you ever could be an awful sight to me!" It was extraordinary what a new intonation had come into her voice.

"Then, in the second place, the doctor wouldn't let me tell you."

"Did you—did you tell him that there was some one to whom you were all the world?"

"Well, I didn't; perhaps for one reason, because I hadn't got my senses when first it happened."

"You talk as if I knew anything at all about it; while I haven't had a word from you or a hint that anything was wrong, until a moment ago when I came into this room." She leaned right over the bed, so that her face was not very far from his; and she whispered, still with that catching in her throat:

"My dear, what did happen? What have they done to you?"

Digitized by Google

"I'm afraid they've made rather a show of me."

"They have? Who have?" There was another little catching in her throat. "Was it Mr. Ray, or—or his friend?"

With an effort he shook his bandaged head.

"No, it wasn't those gentlemen; it was some other friends of mine."

She seemed to be relieved.

"I—I was afraid that Charlie might have had something to do with it."

"Not he. He had nothing to do with it—he or his friends. I have so many friends. How came you to know that I'd met with an accident? Who could have told you about it?"

"I didn't know; haven't I told you I didn't know? That's the awful part of it. I could hear nothing from you; I could get no news of you; I couldn't think what had happened."

"I sent you a message."

"A message! You call that a message! Your Mr. Harper rang me up on the telephone and told me some absurd story about some engagement which prevented your coming over to Kensington, and which even kept you from coming to the telephone to tell me so. As if I didn't know that nothing but something dreadful would keep you from doing that!"

"That first day I was pretty bad; I couldn't even speak. Harper was a sportsman to think of telephoning to you; he did it all off his own bat. I was incapable of giving instructions of any kind."

"Oh, my dear, if you only knew what I endured! I went straight from the telephone to Ella, and I told her that I was sure something dreadful had happened. When she very nearly laughed I could have shaken her. Martin, I—I cried."

She almost cried as she told him. To judge from the way in which he answered it might have been an appalling thing for a young woman to cry.

"My darling! As if I was worth it."

"I wanted to come straight here to see what was the matter, but Ella wouldn't let me. She said she wouldn't allow me to do anything so ridiculous—as if, anyhow, it was any business of hers. So I never slept a wink all night and in the morning I sent you a message. Did your Mr. Harper give it to you?"

"I'm rather hazy about the first forty-eight hours, but I've a sort of dim notion that he did say something about your having telephoned."

"I rang you up after dinner, and he came to the telephone again and said that you hadn't yet returned. I asked him to tell you when you did return that I should be very glad if you could manage to come to Redcliffe Mansions the next morning before eleven, as there was something I rather wished to speak to you about."

"What did he say to that? You see, I just managed to make him understand that I wanted my little accident kept dark from you. Your message must have put him in rather a hole."

"Your Mr. Harper, when talking over a telephone, is most agile. He actually pretended that he thought you had an engagement which would prevent your coming over the next morning. The next morning I rang you up as soon as I was out of bed—there was that trying Mr. Harper at the telephone again! I asked him to send you."

"And what did he say to that?"

"He said that you hadn't been in all night, but that directly you did come in he'd let you know that I'd rung you up."

"Stout fellow, Harper; a man in a thousand. I remember that I was just able to speak to him that morning when he came and told me what you'd done."

"Oh, my dear, if I'd only guessed I wouldn't have been quite so—so worrying." This time the lady's voice suggested penitence. "But if you only knew what it feels like to keep on watching and waiting for a sight of you, for a line from you, for news of you—if it was only a wire. When night comes and you're not a scrap wiser, you're in such a state that feels as if every nerve in your body was being pricked by a red-hot needle."

"My darling! Was it so bad as that?"

"It was worse—ever so much worse. At last I could stand it no longer. I had to come, and I have come, and I'm here, and now that I am here I'm going to stop. I'm going to take off my hat and my jacket and I'm going to wait till the doctor comes; and then if a nurse is required—and it is very likely—I know of a person who is fully qualified to fill the place and who will take more care of you than any professional nurse possibly could.

"And now, perhaps—oh, Martin, if you're

Digitized by Google

not too ill, could you tell me the whole story of what happened to you after you left Redcliffe Mansions, and how you come to be lying here? And please don't imagine that you'll be doing me a kindness by trying to conceal the least tiny thing."

So he told her, and the telling took some time—possibly because she sat by his bedside and occasionally stroked the hand which lay upon the coverlet. During the course of his narrative she went white and red, and she trembled and cried, and gave unmistakable proof of being moved to the very foundations of her being. When he had finished she gave utterance to certain observations, several of which were too private to record. And once she said—

"Martin—I shall always call you Martin even if your real name is Maurice—one can pay too much even for a fortune."

"That depends upon the nature of the fortune. I couldn't pay too much for you."

Whereupon she exclaimed:

"You most wise, you most foolish person! If I could only make you understand that I'm worth less than nothing!"

And when he stopped her she said, speaking always very softly and very tenderly, not at all like the Winifred Dennis we have known.

"Please do try to be reasonable. Rather than that you should run the risks you do it would be much better to give these men what they want. I shall never know a moment's peace of mind if I feel that you are daring them to do their worst—which is practically what you are doing. I have had four dreadful days and nights as it is—and you know I've had so many dreadful days and nights in my time. Don't you think that it might be worth your while to concede a point to them—if not for your sake, then for mine?"

"For your sake I certainly think it would be worth while to concede them anything. One of the things I most desire is that you should know peace of mind."

Her reply was perhaps a little unexpected.

"Then, if that is the case, perhaps you'll let me stay and nurse you. I think that while I am doing that I might know real peace."

She was very close to him when she made that remark. Then many other things were said which also are not to be recorded here.

CHAPTER [illegible]

[illegible]

MARTIN ADAIR, in his [illegible] the hotel, was startled [illegible] which he had found [illegible] upon a table [illegible] that Mr. Foster was [illegible] low. He looked [illegible] luster eyes.

"Mr. Foster?" He seemed [illegible] an effort at recollection. "[illegible] Show Mr. Foster in."

The instant the waiter had gone he [illegible] turned to the study of his telegram; its purport seemed to be beyond his understanding. He read it again and again; then, with knitted brows, seemed to wrestle within himself for its meaning.

"If this is true, then my whole life is changed."

That is what he was saying to himself when the lawyer came into the room.

"You have come in the very nick of time," he told him. "I find myself all at once in a pretty tight place. You might perhaps be able to help me, if one man ever can help another. I've got great news, Foster."

"I also bring what you may consider to be—in a sense—an interesting piece of news. You remember the sealed package which Jerningham Creed committed to my keeping on the understanding that if it were still in my charge when he died, I was to open it within twenty-four hours of his decease? In the package was a dispatch-box, and in the dispatch-box his will. You have it in your recollection?"

"Am I likely to have forgotten it? Of course I have."

"Here is the dispatch-box. When I handed over the will to the usual authorities I retained the box. It stood upon a shelf. This morning, not an hour ago, I accidentally knocked it off. It fell to the floor; as it fell I heard a curious sound come from within.

"I said to myself, 'there's something broken.' I looked inside; nothing was broken, but the force of the fall had loosened a spring. The woodwork at the bottom of the box had come away and disclosed the fact that it was a false bottom and that there was a cavity beneath. The action of the spring had caused the noise I heard.

Digitized by Google

"In the false bottom was an envelope; here it is. I of course have no notion of what it contains, but as the contents may be important I brought it myself as soon as I could."

The lawyer handed the envelope to his client.

"You will observe the inscription."

Across the envelope was written, in small, shaky characters, suggesting the writing of an old man:

To M. A. To be opened only by him, and to be read when he is alone—if this envelope is ever found.

"That's rather an odd inscription. The last words almost suggest what we call a bull—the envelope could hardly be opened by any one if it was never found. I will leave it with you, and the dispatch-box also; you may find it contains other secret places."

Mr. Foster closed his bag, picked up his hat, and made as if he were going. Mr. Adair checked him: he held the envelope, and the telegram was in front of him on the table.

"One moment, Foster, if you please. It would be quite in keeping with Creed's ideas of humor if this envelope contained something in the shape of a codicil, altering the whole of his testamentary dispositions."

"It is scarcely likely to do that, or he would hardly suggest that you should open it only when alone. If his intention was to alter his will he would surely not wish to confine the knowledge of that fact to you alone."

"I see your point. His will left me everything; if this envelope contains a codicil which leaves me nothing I am hardly likely to publish the fact to the whole world. I follow you, Foster."

He paused as if to consider something which he had in his mind, then presently continued.

"I have a telegram here, Foster, which contains what to me is some very vital news. My intention was to let you see it, and to ask your advice on certain points which it raises. But this envelope which you have unearthed rather alters the situation; knowing what I do of Mr. Creed's character, I think I had better make myself master of its contents before I commit myself in any direction whatever.

"I never knew why he made me his heir; he may have done it acting on a whim of the moment, as a sort of joke. I have a strong feeling—in spite, Foster, of the point which you suggested—that this envelope contains something which bears upon his will; I shouldn't be a bit surprised if with one hand he takes away what he gave with the other. That would be rather a facer, considering how far matters have gone."

"I prefer to contemplate no such probability."

"We'll hope you are right; I'm sure I do. Anyhow, before I talk about this telegram I'll see what's in the envelope. I'm to read it when I'm alone, so I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to go; or you might take a chair in here, and I might go into the bedroom and read it there."

"I don't think I should do that. You read it after I've gone. If it contains anything important you can communicate with me at your leisure. I'm not at all sure, mind you, considering the circumstances in which it has come into your possession, that you are bound to communicate the contents to any one—no matter what they are."

"That's a very insidious speech, Foster. Do you mean to say that if this envelope contains something which disinherits me, I'm entitled to keep the knowledge to myself, or even to put the envelope and its contents into the fire?"

"I don't go so far as that—not at all. But I do say that if Creed wished to have the contents of that envelope made public, he ought not to have hidden it where only an accident revealed its presence.

"One parting word of advice, Adair. Whatever the envelope contains, don't be in a hurry. It has lain hidden in the box all this time; it might have remained there for an indefinite number of years. You digest its contents well, and consider them from all possible points of view before you breathe a word of what they are to any one. As I say, do nothing in a hurry."

When the lawyer had gone Martin Adair stood eying the envelope, then he tore it open.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE DEAD MAN SPEAKS

"MY WELL-BELOVED cousin and heir: That I should leave you all I have in the world will probably seem to you such a merry jest that it were perhaps a pity to spoil the full flavor of its humor by

Digitized by Google

explaining that it is perhaps not so funny as it seems. Yesterday I made you my heir; today—or rather tonight—or is it this morning, because midnight is past?—I'm going to tell you why, so far as it may be told.

"Since a man's reasons are not always plain to himself, they are likely, now and then, to be even less clear to others; though sometimes it is the other way about, because there are occasions on which the lookers-on see most of the game. Though I doubt if this is such a case; I doubt it very much indeed; I doubt if, where I have been concerned, a looker-on has ever seen most of the game."

Such was the first paragraph on the several sheets of blue paper which Mr. Adair had taken out of the envelope. There were several sheets, and they were all closely covered with the minute, wavering characters which seemed to be so suggestive of a pen held in an old man's hand.

"At least," the reader told himself, "that doesn't sound as if this were in any way a revocation of his will as I know it. But why does he address me as 'cousin'? Was he humorous to the last, in his own queer vein?"

The explanation came presently. He read on.

IT IS by way of being a coincidence that you and I should both be masquerading under assumed names; for, of course, your name is no more Martin Adair than mine is Jerningham Creed—though I have been Jerningham Creed so long that I doubt that there is a living creature who knows that I was ever any one else. I knew you were not Martin Adair directly I got a good view of your face under the electric standard on the Embankment. That was why I brought you home; that is why I have made you my heir; so the jest has fizzled out.

I was born Jocelyn Culver; that is a name which perhaps you have heard before. Your father was my first cousin, so you are my first cousin once removed. He was Eustace, Marquis of Staines, and you are Maurice Ashurst. Do not suppose for an instant that I ever believed you to be Martin Adair. You are your father's son, every inch of you; though he was a thief, and I think it just possible that you are an honest man.

You know all about me, I take it, since I have told you that I am Jocelyn Culver. Your grandfather's younger sister married my father, and your relations disowned her because she did. So you may believe that I was not taught to love you.

I went to Eton with your father; there I grew to hate him. His standards of honor were his own even in those days; he cut me at every turn. It is one of my pleasantest recollections that I fought him on the Sixpenny for two solid hours—and I broke his nose.

He had it set, but it was never quite straight afterward. The mischief was that the little crook in it improved his personal appearance, and he always was good-looking—as you are, and as I never have been. But in those days physically I was nearly your father's match, as I showed him on Sixpenny. When I was in college, Sixpenny was the Eton battle-ground. It was the grassy arena on which we boys fought all our fights. And good ones some of them were—and fought, as a rule, to a finish.

Once I put your father's nose out of joint; he put mine out for ever after we had left. He married the girl who was engaged to me. Her name was Eleanor Montgomery. Her people and mine were neighbors. We had been girl and boy together. When we reached the age at which people talk about such things, I told her that I loved her, and she admitted that she loved me; we were betrothed, with the approval of the relatives on both sides.

The date of the marriage was actually fixed, when she met your father on Newmarket Heath. He had some slight acquaintance with the people with whom she was staying; by them he was introduced to her—at his request. He had a horse which won a race—I do not know what; it was his hour of success. He laid siege to her; he went home with her friends, and dined with them, and stayed the night.

He hung to her skirts for days; in a week he had won her. When I was expecting her to come home to make the final arrangements for our wedding, there came a note from her instead, in which she informed me, with many tears, and blushes, and sighs; and I dare say groans, that she had run away with your esteemed parent, and that they were already man and wife.

I was one man when I began to read her note; I was another when I had finished.

Digitized by Google

If they had been within reach I should have done my best to kill the pair of them. I resolved to challenge him—they still fought duels, though they were few and far between.

While I was still considering to whom I should entrust my challenge, misfortune overtook me in a new form. My father had some new tandem horses. He took my mother out in a dog-cart to show them off. The leader shied, the wheeler got out of hand; the dog-cart was overturned, while going some fourteen or fifteen miles an hour. The groom at the back, jumping out, escaped with his life; my father and mother were pitched upon their heads and killed on the spot. So I lost wife and parents within a few days.

I could hardly challenge your father before I had buried mine; afterward I did not want to. I had thought of another way.

I had come across a man who had made a fortune by lending money—a usurer. I heard tales about him which, in the state of mind in which I then was, amused me vastly—how he had ruined whole families, stripping them of everything they had, leaving them even without rags to cover their bare bones. He had had transactions with your father; if he chose he might make things awkward for him.

The knowledge that this was so gave me an idea. I wanted to be even with your father, somehow—I did not much care how; and with the woman he had married. If I fought a duel with him he might win—I should not get even with him that way. But I saw a way in which I might get more than even.

My father, and my mother also—I was their only child—had left me all they had; which meant that I was well provided for; I sold the house in which I was born, and the furniture—which was much older than I was—and the land over which I had wandered since I first could toddle. Altogether I had quite a large capital. With this I commenced business, as a usurer. I dropped my own name, cut all my acquaintance, took chambers in the Temple, and there began to spin my webs.

You will say, perhaps, that I was mad; that there was a flaw somewhere in my mental equipment. I had to do something. What could I do? Marriage was out of the question. I would never give another woman the chance to treat me as your father's wife had done.

The home in which I had passed my life so far had grown dreadful in my eyes. All the countryside knew my story. I knew perfectly well what every one said of me—that I was the man whom the girl had jilted; and they would enter into details of how she had jilted me—how she had thrown me over for another almost at the foot of the altar.

I provided conversation for numbers of people who were glad of something they could talk about. I was a topic of which they never tired. It was obvious that I could not stay at home. What could I do with myself, circumstanced as I was, if I went away? I might have gone, as some young men do, to the devil; I might have drunk and gambled, and added ruin to ruin. But I did not—I had no taste for that kind of thing. I was almost a teetotaler; I liked neither racing nor cards.

Until your father married my intended wife I protest that I was a normal Englishman; he changed all that. The more I studied the question, the more I was tickled by the idea of lending money to needy fools, or scamps, at usurious interest. It was the nearest modern equivalent to piracy; it was like taking out letters of marque. A usurer was a licensed—or perhaps unlicensed—free-booter. It was one's own fault if one did not keep out of reach of the law.

So I established myself in chambers in Mitre Court as Jerningham Creed, and I flourished exceedingly. I soon learned that I had a head for business—of that kind; and I managed things very well. Soon I was carrying on business in more than fifty towns, in each under a different name.

I had half a dozen branches in London. Practically more than one firm of solicitors were employed in working solely for me. They gave me a commission out of the costs they expected from my clients, whom I instructed them to grind to powder. Before very long I was not only prospering as a usurer; in other directions I was doing better still. Quite candidly, my well beloved cousin, I launched on a life of adventure.

THAT also was an accident. One day a man came in who wanted to borrow five hundred pounds. When I asked him what security he had to offer, he took a case out of his pocket and showed me a diamond necklace. He said he had

Digitized by Google

that to offer. I knew something of diamonds—I had lent money on them before then—and I knew quite well that that necklace was worth more than five hundred pounds; that if I could offer it in the open market I should probably get two thousand.

So I looked at the man and I looked at the necklace. I had the nucleus of a persuasive manner about me even in those days. In a few minutes the whole story was out. The necklace had belonged to the Countess of Stornaway; it had got itself mislaid on the Great Northern Railway, between Edinburgh and London. My visitor had found it. So I bought it for five hundred pounds.

That was the first time I ever played the part of a receiver of stolen goods—the receiver who, they say, is worse than the thief. The part suited me; it had about it a flavor of adventure which mere usury lacked. Then it opened such a vista. I lent money to people all over Europe; suppose I bought stolen goods on the same scale, what thrilling moments I might have!

Then also, as I fingered the Countess of Stornaway's diamond necklace, I realized, not for the first time, that if any capacity to love was still left to me, it was the capacity to love what men call precious stones. It is good to dip your hands and, as it were, bathe them in a heap of gold. I liked to take up handfuls of sovereigns. But diamonds, pearls, rubies, emeralds, the glowing beauties snatched from earth's most sacred places—compared to gold they were as the sun to the moon. Fancy washing your hands in them! I decided there was nothing I should like better than to be the possessor of sacks full of precious stones. So I set about getting them.

I am not providing you with a treatise on abstract morality. I am not so much immoral as non-moral. In my code of ethics morality doesn't count. If I choose to buy what A stole from B, I buy it; and there's an end. Unless the policeman intervenes, and then the end takes a different form. But no policeman ever has intervened with me. No doubt I have been lucky; but I fancy it has not been so much a question of luck as of caution. Soon after I began my second line of business the chambers below mine became vacant. I took them in the name of Latraille and Olgano. They became the offices of Messrs. Latraille, Olgano and Company. They were the principal buyers of a certain sort of goods. Nothing was ever bought unless it was clearly shown how the seller became possessed of what he had to offer. I have kept minute records of each and every transaction; you will perhaps have found them before you read this. There are other little contrivances of mine on which you may also have stumbled.

I have, at the present time of writing, what I believe to be one of the finest, if not the finest, collections of precious stones in the world—that is, in one man's hands. I have not kept all I have bought for various reasons. I have found excellent markets for, I suppose, one-third of my purchases. The whole thing has been a first rate speculation; the profits most satisfactory—quite apart from the fact that I have such a desirable stock in trade.

I will call it stock in trade, though I have so managed matters that it has practically cost me nothing. It is worth—I wonder if you will ever find out how much it is worth. Stated in round figures, such an appetizing sum of money!

And then the fun I've had! I daresay the buccaneers of the Spanish main knew stirring times; I doubt if they were more stirring than some of those which I have known. Yes, and I am writing in the days when all that kind of thing is supposed to be as extinct as the dodo. No romance in life nowadays; no spirit of adventure—that is what the pundits say. I think of their wise saws; then I open one of my cases and play with the contents, and I laugh.

You must not laugh; you must be serious.

I have flourished as the righteous flourish, since I have put righteousness behind me—and I have ruined you and yours. That has been one of the greatest of my successes. Everything which your family had is, I believe, at present mine—even to the family honor. I have that in a little box.

I broke your father; your father broke his first wife's heart, so that she died, and he married a second and begat you; and now I have broken you, and your mother, and your half brother—and you're all down in the dirt together, a dishonored, starveling crew! You've even robbed the woman who was to be your wife—you, my well beloved heir.

I lent the money for which your brother forged. I will not deny, if you press me, that the idea of employing that means of getting money was put into his head by me. Your father died a miserable, shamefaced,

Digitized by Google

old rag, and I am still living. I think I can cry quits with him now.

He did me out of my wife, to whom, after a while, he became heartily welcome—she wore so badly; I have done him out of a good deal more than a wife—I have done the lot of you. That is some time ago. I had put you all out of my head, and then I met you on the Embankment. That was rather a curious meeting.

I had been to a certain place where I do business, which I think it advisable to visit only at night. Returning at the usual matutinal hour, I met you. The incidents which marked our meeting are probably fresh in your memory; they are in mine. The gentlemen who attacked me under the shadow of Waterloo Bridge were, I fancy, clients of a former time.

I have had several little experiences of the kind. Clients become dissatisfied; deeming discretion to be the better part of valor, they themselves keep in the background, but they commission their friends to take it out of me. That, I imagine, was the explanation of that little incident. They might have murdered me; you came along, and they did not. You nearly murdered them instead.

It did me good to see the way you laid about you. And then, when I got a good sight of your face, and knew you to be Maurice Ashurst—you may smile, but the discovery kept me up all night thinking.

So you became a clerk in my office. Six foot four, with clothes appertaining to five foot ten—second-hand clothes at that. You were a figure of fun; you have been a figure of fun all the months I have had you in my employ. I admit that I never imagined you would stay, or I doubt if I would ever have had you. You were an Ashurst, the Ashursts are a tainted lot; I took it for granted that you were like the rest of your breed. If before long—on thirty shillings a week, with stoppages which made it twenty—you did not openly kick over the traces, you would probably endeavor to supply the deficiency in your income by methods which would give me a grip on you.

I was always on the lookout for petty pilfering—you remember how I have sometimes left a lot of loose cash about—I thought that you might take a shilling here or a shilling there. If you had gone as high as a sovereign it would have been all the better; I should have had you anyhow. But you never did. I will be quite candid; I believe you to be at once the first and the only honest Ashurst I have ever heard of. You are honest to the point of quixotism. I have tested you in divers ways of which you have never dreamed; I have hoped that somehow I should find you wanting; but I never have. I have come to the conclusion that you have a standard of your own, and that you could not depart from it if you tried.

In short, my well-beloved heir, I came to the conclusion that you were that most amazing of all fools—a gentleman and a man of honor.

The discovery put another idea into my head. I could not get the better of you in one way; I might in another. Suppose I were to make you my heir? That would put you in a pretty hole. You would soon find out that, to put it in the most modest form, a good many of my possessions were ill-gotten. I pictured to myself what you would look like when you discovered that beyond all possibility of doubt you were the nominal owner of a large amount of stolen property. Unless I err, the first thing you would do would be to restore it to its owners.

That would be a pretty business. Your inheritance would be to you like the medieval hair-shirt, an occasion of much inconvenience. Quite possibly you would find yourself involved with the police, not only of this great country, but of others. You would have a fine time.

There would be my clients as well. More than once they have nearly had my life. You being of a more aggressive nature, they would almost certainly have yours. I have suffered much at their hands; please the Fates, you would suffer more. If things should go as I expect, they should make your life a misery.

So I have made you my heir. That is the last link in the chain of vengeance which, in this case, has reached beyond the grave. You have known despair because of me; now you shall know the prickings of a vigorous conscience; you shall suffer remorse, and the resultant penalties—for what I have done.

It is a great idea. I ask myself if, when you read this, you will think so. Were power given to the dead to have glimpses of the living, how I should like to stand behind you while you are reading, and then lean over

Digitized by Google

your shoulder and stare into your face when you have done. Would it be the face of a haunted man—the face of a man whose conscience goads him as with the whip of the avenging furies?

GOOD-BY, my well-beloved heir. I have made you my heir because I do not love you—so I call you well-beloved. You are my cousin once removed. I may outlive you. The physician who examines for an insurance company told me only the other day that physically I am as sound as a bell. I may see you under the sod; dropped into a pauper's grave. So may it be!

In that case you will not read this; I shall have it back again. I hope I may derive as much amusement from the re-reading as I have from the writing. If you should outlive me—you are the younger man, and on the face of it you should—then I wish you well. I trust you may derive all the benefits from your inheritance that I anticipate, and that, through you, I may once more be even with your father.

I am, in conclusion I would say it, my dear Maurice, your tender-hearted, if far-seeing cousin, Jocelyn Culver.

P. S. (A woman's.)——If you get all the good I wish you, you will do well. Within a month of my being dead—shall I say I hope that you will not be a convicted felon?

CHAPTER XXVII

WHAT WAS IN THE TELEGRAM

MARTIN ADAIR—the present writer will call him that to the end—having read what was written on the blue papers to the very last word, sat and thought. Those blue papers contained matter of which he would probably still be thinking when he was an old man.

He pictured Jerningham Creed in that dirty sitting-room of his, which was a veritable treasure house in spite of all its filth, sitting at the untidy table, alone, in some silent watch of the night, his head bent close to the sheet as was his wont when he wrote, penning word after word and line after line of that frank revelation of the manner of man he really was. And as he dwelt upon the picture presented to his brain, Martin Adair began to understand.

"I wish," he said to himself, "that he was standing behind me, and could lean over my shoulder and look into my face. I wonder what his feelings would be when his eyes met mine, knowing that I had just read this. To think that he should have made me his heir for such a reason! He was a fellow of infinite jest, my cousin Jocelyn."

While Adair sat with the blue papers still upon his knee, John Harper came into the room.

"I have arranged with Outerbridge," he said, speaking without any sort of preamble. "You're to hand over to him, in the presence of his friends, the twenty thousand pounds, and you're to treat them to a little entertainment. He on his side guarantees that his friends thenceforward will cease to favor you with their attentions. You'll be able to walk abroad, in other words, without fearing that your naturally fine features may be further damaged."

"That's good. I shall be glad to be rid of Messrs. Outerbridge & Co. As for the others——" The speaker paused.

"There are others? How many? You can't say? That's cheery. Can't you manage to wipe them off *en bloc*, and clean the slate?"

"I dare say; I have no fear."

"You never had any fear; that's not the point. They may lay you out, although you have no fear. It's not fair to the future Mrs. Adair—or rather Lady Ashurst—that you should continue to run a risk which can by any possibility be avoided. She fears for you, if you don't for yourself—or for her."

"Harper, I'll make friends with all the world, on my honor, as far as it is in my power. By the way, you spoke just now of the future Lady Ashurst—I've just had that."

He gave Mr. Harper the telegram, which all this while had lain open upon the table. Harper read it through, then broke into exclamation.

"Great Scott, man! What does this mean?"

"It means that my wife who is to be will not be Lady Maurice Ashurst; she'll be the Marchioness of Staines. My brother is dead, so the lawyers say—that is, if that telegram really comes from them, which I think we may take for granted."

"And you are the next heir?"

"I'm not only the next; I'm the only heir.

Digitized by Google

I believe that practically, I'm the last Ashurst living. There may be some members of a remote cadet branch somewhere, but they are unknown to me. I'm the only real Ashurst. And I'm like a man who confronts a company of dreadful ghosts—the ghosts of my sires.

"They were all pretty dreadful people living, and I don't fancy they're much better dead. We've been a rotten lot, the family I represent; let's hope that I'm what the doctors call a 'sport,' not in the least like the stock from whom I've sprung. If I could I'd drop the name; I'd continue to be Martin Adair. But I believe the law won't let me. I have to be the Marquis of Staines, whether I will or no. Offer up a prayer, Harper, that the last Marquis of Staines may be better than any of his predecessors."

"I've not the slightest doubt that he will—not that I believe for a moment, knowing what I do of the position of affairs, that you are likely to be the last Marquis of Staines. Is anything settled about when the wedding is to be?"

Even as he asked the question the girl came into the room, without there being any announcement of her coming. She had reached that stage when she came and went just as the fancy took her.

"Here's a lady," said Mr. Adair, "who can answer that question much better than I can. Winnie, here's Harper wants to know if there's anything settled about the date when the wedding is to be."

She looked at him and she smiled, as she had not used to smile.

"I've been talking it over with Ella," she said.

"That's something. And what did Ella say? I should like to know what some one said, and so would Harper."

"Ella thinks that it would perhaps be better if we didn't have a big wedding."

"That's nice of Ella; especially as I think what Ella thinks."

The girl, quite unconscious of what they were, was fingering the blue papers which had come out of the envelope; she looked down.

"How long would it take to get a special license?"

"About ten minutes, or less—put it at the outside, a quarter of an hour."

"And how long before we could be married after you had got the license?"

"So far as I understand the procedure, you only have to take it to a church, and say to the parson, 'here's the license, and here's my wife that is to be,' and he marries you."

Then she looked up at him.

"Settle with those men. Tell me that I need no longer lie awake at night fearing that harm may come to you from any one; assure me that you have done your best to make your peace with all who wish you ill. So soon as you can do that you may get the marriage license."

"I'll get the license," he told her, "within a week."

She turned to John Harper.

"You will see," she said, "that he makes peace with all his enemies."

"I will, that. He shall turn them into friends—such of them, that is, as are worth turning. I'll make it my especial business to see that you shall have no cause on that account to lie awake at night."

"Thank you; I trust you—both." She picked up the blue papers she had been fingering. "What are these?" she asked.

Adair answered:

"That's a voice from the grave. That's Jerningham Creed's apology for his life, wherein he sets forth the reason he lived as he did—and why he chose me as his heir. It makes very curious reading. I commend it to your attention, Winnie, and to yours, Harper."

"Why did he make you his heir?"

"Because he hated me—that's a fact. He was a cousin of my father; Creed was an *alias* like Adair. I remember hearing of him when I was a lad. The girl to whom he was engaged jilted him in favor of my father—my mother was his second wife, she was his first. Jocelyn Culver—that was old Creed's real name—I have been told, was always a curious fish; that paper shows it. The girl was well rid of him, though she behaved very badly; and so did my father.

"Thenceforward Culver made it one of the chief objects of his life to ruin them both. He transferred his spite to the second generation, meaning me. He knew me all the while, even when I was a starveling clerk in his office. He made me his heir because, as that paper sets forth, he thought it was the greatest injury he could do me. He was mistaken. He did me no injury; he could have conferred on me no greater benefit.

Digitized by Google

"This bids fair to be a red-letter day to me, Winnie. I see myself well within reach of a wife; I have resolved the problem which has puzzled me—why Jerningham Creed made me his heir; and I learn that my wife, when I get her, will be the Marchioness of Staines.

"This telegram I not long ago received from the firm who have been our family lawyers, I believe for generations. You will see that they tell me that my brother Eustace, who was the Marquis, died last week at Aix-les-Bains. That means that I succeed, and that you will be the Marchioness."

The girl regarded him as if she were not sure if he was in jest or earnest; then she read the telegram; then looked back at him with streaming eyes. Something for a moment seemed to prevent her speaking; when she did speak her voice was trembling.

"I am not fit," she said.

Martin Adair moved toward her as John Harper went out of the room.

CHAPTER XXVIII

TAKEN FROM THE LIFE

IT WAS a singular assemblage.

The room was large. A long table ran down the center; at the head was Martin Adair, John Harper was at the foot. Curious personalities some of the diners had.

Next to Maximilian Outerbridge was a big, burly, dark-faced man, with a big nose and thick lips—Aaron Lowenstan, of Amsterdam, a famous dealer in diamonds, one of the committee brought together by John Harper to what he called "arbitrate" on the question of the loot from the Winter Palace at Pekin. This assembly was gathered together for the purpose of carrying out that committee's award. There were Chinamen there, six or seven of them; half a dozen other men who were perhaps Malays, or Lascars, or, at any rate, inhabitants of the Far East—all of them persons who were obviously of humble stations in life. An unprepossessing-looking lot they were.

Adair, standing up in his place at the head of the table, explained the position as there passed down the table two wooden boxes.

"Those, Mr. Outerbridge," he observed, "are for you. Each contains ten thousand sovereigns. They're pretty heavy—you noticed that each took two men to carry. In each box there are five shelves divided into partitions containing a hundred sovereigns—there are two thousand sovereigns on each shelf, as I said; ten thousand on the five. You can count them now, if you like, but they were counted not long ago in the presence of the gentlemen of the committee who are now here. They will assure you that the number is as I have said. Still, for your own satisfaction, and the satisfaction of your friends, would you like to count them?"

Outerbridge had raised the lids of the two boxes; he had lifted with difficulty—strong man though he was—one of the trays; his eyes gleamed as they lighted on the neatly arranged masses of yellow metal. His friends had risen from their chairs. As they leaned toward him not only their eyes, but their whole countenances, shone. One felt that it would need very little to induce them to fall upon the boxes tooth and nail.

The babel died away. The excited yellow gentlemen resumed their seats; Outerbridge was apparently master of the situation. He addressed his host, his jovial face radiant with smiles.

"Speaking on behalf of my friends here, we'll take it that these two boxes contain the sum as stated. If there's more, when it comes to the counting, we'll probably hand it back to you; if there's a trifle less, no doubt you'll make it good. The treatment you mete out shall be meted to you again—you may take my word for that."

"Thank you, Outerbridge; that sounds almost Scriptural. You won't mind giving me a receipt for the two boxes; and I trust I may take it for granted that the transaction is closed in a manner which is entirely satisfactory to you and your friends."

"Entirely. I think I am in a position to give you my personal assurance that henceforth my friends will be yours."

The presentation of the two boxes seemed to impress the majority of the diners with a feeling that the proceedings were at an end; evidently their one desire was to get away and divide the spoil. This desire to hurry off was checked by their host.

"One moment, gentlemen. Before you go I have prepared a little entertainment which I should like you to see. You have no doubt all of you heard of the cinematograph. I have here a film which I feel, and

Digitized by Google

I am sure you will feel, ought to be shown on an occasion like this. Since I had it specially developed for your—amusement, I shall be obliged by your keeping your seats for the very few minutes which will be required to show it. I need not tell you that a cinematographic film can not be shown in a brilliant light like this; therefore during the requisite few minutes, with your very kind permission, the lights will be lowered."

The lights were lowered; and the same instant a hubbub arose. Apparently the gentlemen from the east had not understood what Adair had said, or, if they had, had not appreciated its intention. When the room was plunged into comparative darkness it would seem that they suspected that they were about to be made the victims of some trick. Outerbridge's voice was heard above the din.

"Turn up the lights, man; we shall have trouble if you don't. We don't want to have any fooling with a cinematograph."

Adair replied in tones which were equally audible.

"I don't propose to treat you to any fooling, Outerbridge; you tell your friends to keep their eyes upon that screen."

Apparently a cinematographic apparatus had been established in a sort of cupboard which had been fitted up in one end of the room, at the back of the host. An aperture had been made in it not far from the ceiling, from which a ray of light streamed above the people's heads on to a sheet which had been stretched upon the opposite wall.

Adair struck a bell; something happened to the sheet—something of which every creature in the room became instantly conscious. The voices of the Chinamen were stilled; comparative silence reigned. A picture appeared upon the sheet. Whether the Chinamen thought it had come there by magic there was nothing to show; that the sight hushed their chatter was evident upon the face of things. One felt that all eyes were not only fixed upon the screen, but that they were riveted there.

The picture upon the screen represented a room—a room with which probably every person present was familiar; the room which Jerningham Creed had used as an office. It was apparently night; the room was empty. Then one saw that one of the windows was raised. An arm came through; a head appeared above the sill; some one came through the window on to the floor—a man who stood with his back to the lens, so that at first his face was hidden. When presently he turned they saw that his was the face of a Chinaman.

He seemed to be disturbed in his mind, as if something were happening for which he was unprepared; he was apparently in two minds whether to go or stay.

A door in the corner opened, through which a figure appeared—the figure of an old man in his night-shirt. Every one who sat there staring recognized Jerningham Creed. Clearly he had just been aroused from slumber, and tumbling out of bed had come in hot haste to learn what had disturbed him. He stood for a moment in the doorway, then came quickly forward with an odd, jerky movement, as if he were cold, or old and stiff.

Obviously he saw the intruder; equally obviously the intruder saw him. The two men stood and eyed each other. Apparently Creed was about to ask a question when the other sprang toward him. He took something from his jacket pocket—something which he carried in his hand—something with which, without any sort of warning, he struck the old man on the head; and the old man went down to the floor—and there he stayed.

The intruder remained motionless on the spot where he had struck. He leaned over the recumbent figure; then raised his head and listened, and looked again. The old man lay still. Dropping on to one knee he turned the old man over, peered at his head, touched it with his fingers. Then he looked at what he had on his hand—those assembled around that dinner table could see that it was wet with blood.

Then he stood up straight and listened again. There began to appear at the open window another head. Before they could see to what manner of person it belonged some one sprang at the screen at one end of the room, and at the cupboard at the other. The screen was torn from its place, and the lights were raised—the whole place was full of hubbub.

"What's the matter with your friends?" cried Adair; his voice was heard above all the din. "Don't they like the entertainment I have provided for their amusement?"

Mr. Outerbridge gave no direct answer. He was issuing what seemed to be orders—speaking again in that foreign tongue. Four men seized each of the two wooden

Digitized by Google

boxes; they bore them to the entrance, their friends about them on either side and at their heels, Outerbridge, as it were, acting as a convoy. No one offering them any hindrance, they passed out of the room, and Martin Adair's little entertainment was finished.

"What was the meaning of that picture?" asked a member of John Harper's committee, of the host. "Was it a little joke you wished to play on them?"

Adair smiled.

"It's a joke," he said, "which you perhaps will see again. I've an idea that the original film may become the property of Messieurs Plantin Frères of Paris."

THE film was shown, as Monsieur Roland had predicted, in practically every city, town and hamlet in the world; and that with the implied approval of the English police. At least, they made no attempt to stop it. So it came about that north, east, west and south, people were looking for the murderer of Jerningham Creed; yet they never found him.

The figure with the Chinaman's face, and the sandbag in his hand, stood looking out from the screen at all sorts and conditions of people; but in the flesh not one of them ever saw him—at any rate with any consciousness of recognition. None the less, as again Monsieur Roland had foreseen, no film ever tickled the public fancy as that one did; people flocked to see what beyond the shadow of a doubt was a genuine murder.

Martin Adair and Winifred Dennis were married, and they came out of the church the Marquis and Marchioness of Staines. John Harper was best man; Mr. Bishop Guy gave the bride away; there were no bridesmaids; even the newspapers did not know that a member of the peerage had been married.

A few days before the marriage Mr. Adair straightened matters with some one else. He handed a considerable sum of money to Gordon Ray on the understanding that he would take himself out of the country, and that in the event of his becoming a respectable citizen—say on the African veld, after an interval during which proof would be given that it was his intention to run straight—he would receive a further sum, sufficient to establish him on the road of work which leads to honesty.

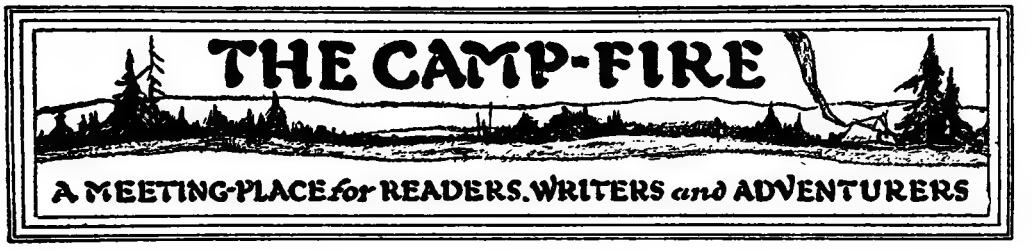
Adair himself saw Charles Dennis off from a Liverpool wharf, bound for that land of promise in which so many men have tried to make a fresh start—the Dominion of Canada. The Marquis and Marchioness had rather an original notion for their honeymoon; they proposed to spend at least the first year of their married life in journeying round the world.

"I want to see," the lady said, "the places you saw when you were still wandering in the wilderness."

"You shall." The gentleman laughed.

THE END

Digitized by Google



ARTHUR H. MORSE, with a story in this issue, makes his first appearance at our Camp-Fire as a writer, and in accordance with our custom rises in his place and introduces himself:

As to an adventurous life, I'll have to say emphatically that mine has not smacked of thrills of the Hairbreadth Harry variety. As to what I have in store for me it is hard to predict, for I am just twenty-one. I have had an excellent education in the best schools obtainable. Have always loved to write; in fact it seems second nature to me. But I am crude, very crude, a beginner, resting on the first rung of the ladder, and struggling bravely to ascend the many more rungs to the top which means success.

TRAVEL has been my main asset in reaching the first rung. I have been all over the United States, Hawaiian Islands, Cuba, Japan, China, Philippines, Cochin-China, Straits Settlements, Java, India, Arabia, Egypt, and all of Europe. This travel has made me a keen observer and has helped me the most in my writing. I am contemplating a trip next Spring to Northern Africa, Europe and India. My brain is a jumble of memoirs of many interesting experiences encountered in many different countries, but none are of the adventurous type.

It was while en route between San Francisco and Honolulu on the Pacific mail steamer *Korea* that I had the rare good fortune to come into possession of the germ which later sprouted into "The Return of Wolf McInnis." Of the many first-class passengers on board there were two who interested me very much. Briefly speaking, one was a man, the other a woman—the two dominating factors in life's flotsam, and the beacon lights that we struggling writers focus our gaze upon and weave our plot-webs around.

WELL, the woman was an Hawaiian of the upper class, young and beautiful, with jet-black hair that was thick and pliant, large black eyes that glowed with a burning passion for the one man. Her features were finely chiseled; her complexion of a soft, olive hue. The man was an American, big and handsome and strong. They were married, but to me they did not appear happy. I had the good fortune to become acquainted with them both. She was rich, very rich, owning vast rice plantations on the Islands. He seemed to care for her in a way, a sort of brutal way, as if she were far beneath him. With her it was just the reverse; she idolized him, her whole life was centered in him. She took his rebukes with a smile, and there was not the slightest doubt in my mind, should danger befall him, that she would strike with all the fury of a venom-swollen snake. From this germ my lively imagination ran riot and I wrote "The Return of Wolf McInnis," shifting the scenes to Alaska. I have long since wondered if the pair encountered any such experiences as fell to the lot of *Wolf* and *Céleste*.

TO ME, from the very first, "Lost Trails" has been wonderfully dramatic and full of human interest. It was started solely to be of practical service to our readers, but before long I found that it was no peculiarity of mine that made it interesting reading—that many of you read it before you read anything else in the magazine and are as deeply interested as I in these little glimpses into the dramas and tragedies of human lives.

And after all, no wonder. There is enough heartache, mystery, adventure, romance, tragedy and wanderlust in that monthly page or two of inquiries to satisfy even a chronic reader of dime novels. We may think we live in a dull, humdrum world, but suddenly we have it borne in upon us that we have found it humdrum only because we did not know what was going on around us—did not know the little undercurrents flowing beneath the quiet surface of affairs.

They are very brief and matter of fact, these little items, but—read between the lines.

BEST of all, "Lost Trails" has been the means of finding many and many a son or father or brother or chum or sweetheart, or of ending the aching waiting with the sad but merciful news of death by land or sea. It has proved so efficient, often where detectives, newspapers and private effort have failed, that it has become a problem to hold it down to the space at its disposal. Now we print each item in full one month and print the name in alphabetical order the

Digitized by Google

second and third months. If this does not bring results, the name is filed away in our records.

But in the January and July issues of each year we again print *all* names not yet located. So keep your eye on these two issues and make sure that neither you yourself nor some one you have known is being sought by some one.

HERE is one of many testimonials to the work done by "Lost Trails" through the information and assistance furnished by our readers:

Through the Lost Trails in a few weeks I had secured full information concerning my brother from as many as six men who had known him in the Northwest. Lost Trails did more in that short time than the family had been able to do in six years.
WADE PEPPER, Wheeling, W. Va.

THE European war will impress many lessons upon the world. One of them is the extreme value of peace. Another the value of being prepared for war if it is thrust upon you. At this writing there has not yet been time to hear from any of you on the suggestion of E. D. Cook in the November "Camp-Fire" of a Legion of real adventurers organized in coördination with the general plans of the War Department and planned to furnish the country in time of need with one or more bodies of men already trained to warfare and capable of taking care of themselves in the open. It will give the adventurer a chance to serve with other tried men instead of with green, untested ones, and is likely to facilitate his getting to the front instead of fretting away time in some camp while others are doing the fighting.

PROPERLY worked out, it would entail no restrictions or duties during times of peace other than registration and readiness to report when needed for war service. This Camp-Fire of ours makes it possible to form such a Legion, and this magazine freely offers its organizing services to such of you as take up the idea and turn it into a reality. Which means that *Adventure* will help all it can but will take none of the authority or credit to itself. It's a good idea, that Legion, and there are enough seasoned men among you to fill its complement twenty-five times over.

THIS is a post-card from an American serving on a British war-ship, with whom I've been in correspondence for some time, and who had an item in last month's "Wanted" column:

Please cancel ad. in "Wanted" column. Sorry to trouble, but I am back again in British Navy, hoping to squash German high-sea barges. I guess I sha'n't be free to lead expedition in Jan.; you see this scrap kinder appeals to my gentle instincts. If you'll keep it by and let me know I'll arrange later. It's the thing of a lifetime and more dangerous than this scrap, so I sure won't drop it. Regards. H. S. LOVETT."

NOW for an adventurer's interesting letter written on the steamship *Condor* at Talara, Peru, some time last Summer. I have never met the writer, for he gave as his only address the British Consul in New York, and if my letter reached him there was no reply. I wonder where he is now. Quite probably on some European battlefield, dead or alive. Possibly still following the call of the wanderlust. In any case, here's luck to him, good hunting and a fair breeze.

Have read with a good deal of interest the stories that appear in your magazine. You cater for a critical class, and I dare say your magazine wanders around almost as much as your writers. I have struck copies in some queer, out-of-the-way places at times, and they have always been welcome. Last issue I got hold of was in the mountains of Peru at the Sierra de Pasco Cox mine. Another time in Gwelo, Rhodesia. Shows how it gets round. I am greatly interested in the idea of the Camp-Fire Corner. Having been considerable of a wanderer—and up to date a failure—myself, fortune not yet having knocked at my door, it rather appeals to me, so perhaps a brief account of some of my own trips may be of interest to your readers.

I AM an Australian. Earliest recollections sitting with my brother in two candle-boxes, strapped on a packhorse bound for a rush in Queensland. With the dad, afterward when older, I followed the different rushes to diggings that more times than enough turned out failures. We tackled West Australia in the time of the boom and, though others made fortunes all around us, we barely cleared tucker. Had a go at opal, tin and gem digging with, however, little success. Sad spells, I would tackle bust work, droving, etc., to raise another stake to have a go again at the elusive yellow. On the outbreak of war I joined the 1st Imperial Bushmen, serving with them till their time was up, when I joined two other irregular corps to the finish of the scrap. Rambled through Rhodesia prospecting and, finally going broke, tramped it to Beira, Portuguese East Africa, thence Durban across to China by tramp steamer, stoking, paying off in Hong Kong.

Digitized by Google

WENT to Canton after a job; no good; returned and, finding it impossible to ship out, swam out and stowed away on an Italian steamer, *Capri*, bound with Chink coolies to Johore. Got through all safe, served in the Straits Settlements, thence to Broome, Northwestern Australia; had a cut at pearling, though we whites only had the shell-opening part of it, Malays, Japs and Manila men doing the diving and pump-tending.

Left there, smallpox breaking out, and joined an outfit taking a mob of cattle down to the goldfields—a four-months' trip. Got to Fremantle eventually and thence to Sydney, and Buenos Aires, S. A. Worked in various places through the Argentine. Finally I and an American walked over the Andes in the depth of Winter to Valparaiso. That little jaunt was no joke.

LEFT for New Orleans; thence overland to Frisco, taking various jobs by the way, last as cook for the X ranch, Deeth, Nevada, cooking for an alfalfa crowd. Hit 'Frisco, thence to Sydney. Over to Japan next with 900 horses, part of a draft of 10,000, the war then being in full swing. We ran the blockade successfully, the lights of the Baltic fleet being on us twice, but we managed to evade capture by the simple expedient of putting out our lights and running back, it luckily being foggy. Reached Ujina in the Inland Sea, where we discharged the horses without mishap. Back to Queensland, thence to England, Odessa, Russia, back over to New York, Brazil and Mexico, loading mahogany, and now round to the West Coast.

IN INTERVALS I have worked ashore most everywhere. I am too infernally restless to settle down to a staid, prosaic life, so would like to run across some one that needs the services of a man who can turn his hand to anything from cooking a steak or making bread with the rain pouring down, to packing a bike or horse or running an engine. A fair shot and rider, swimmer, etc.—one that doesn't get his tail down at the first mishap; in fact, one fitted for any old job at any place under the sun that promises a little remuneration and plenty of travel. Thirty-six years of age, 150 pounds weight, and more used to outdoor life than any other.

YOU will have to excuse this scribble, but things are a trifle mixed on this packer to-day, the crowd all being on a howling drunk, the natives having managed to get past the mate with a load of pesco (chained hell), and they are acting the goat round the deck and giving exhibition spots on No. 1 Hatch. The bosun's monkey, too, has got to the paint-pot and is sitting on the rail looking the picture of abject misery.

Well, I expect I must cut the yarn short. Should you know or hear of any one requiring a good mate or man I shall be in New York three months from date when my ship pays off. I would like you to send me an identification card.

Pen and ink are rather at a premium in this ship, so you must excuse pencil. You may use any or all of this letter if you wish, so with best wishes for the continued success of *Adventure*, I am,

HENRY C. WINTERS.

FULL data on the Adventurers' Club will be sent from this office on request, though the Club has no connection with the Camp-Fire or *Adventure*.

THE East makes its reply to the West in the following letter and poem from a member of our Coast Artillery:

DEAR SIR: As a constant reader of your magazine and a critic of good literature, I beg to offer an amendment of a poem issued in August *Adventure*, "The West," by Berton Braley. Please publish the enclosed poem.

Thanking you in advance and calling your attention to the fact that I am one who upholds the dignity of the East,

WILLIS M. RANDALL, Fort Andrews, Boston.

THE EAST

Now it isn't just in Boston, and it isn't in New York,
Nor in the old New England States, nor in the Yankees' talk;
And it's not alone in places where the greeting hand meets you:
That's the way we greet our friends and welcome strangers too.
No; the East is just a spirit formed of culture and of youth,
And of tenderness and hospitality the least.
And love for all its people, for strangers and for truth—
Wherever these are gathered, it's the East.

HERE, again, is the brief explanation of our identification-cards. They are offered free of charge to any of you. All we ask is that you comply carefully with the simple directions as they appear below in italics:

The cards bear this inscription, printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, U. S. A., stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one friend, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. The names and addresses will be treated as confidential by us. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for purposes of business identification. Later, arrangements may perhaps be made for money deposits to cover cable or telegraph notifications. Cards furnished free of charge, *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application. Send no applications without the two names and two addresses in full.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Later, for the cost of manufacture, we may furnish, instead of the above cards, a card or tag of aluminum, proof against heat, water and general wear and tear, for adventurers when actually in the jungle, desert, etc.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give the two names and addresses in full when applying.*

GEORGE A. SCHREINER, whose articles on the Boer War you will remember and who served through that struggle as an officer in the famous Staats Artillery, returned from duty as an American correspondent in Mexico one day early in August

Digitized by Google

and was despatched the next day on a like mission to the war in Europe. He writes me that he has good material from both scenes of action for *Adventure* readers.

INFORMATION DIRECTORY

IMPORTANT: Only items like those below can be printed—standing sources of information. No room on this page to ask or answer specific questions. Recommend no source of information you are not *sure* of. False information may cause serious loss, even loss of life. *Adventure* does its best to make this directory reliable, but assumes no responsibility therefor.

For data on the Amazon country write Algot Lange, care Explorers' Club, 345 Amsterdam Ave., New York City. Replies only if stamped, addressed envelope is enclosed and only at Mr. Lange's discretion, this service being purely voluntary.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii and Alaska, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Ag., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen., Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

CAN you add any reliable sources of adventure information to our new Information Directory above? Read carefully the note marked "Important."

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN.

YOUR CHANCE TO HELP EDIT "ADVENTURE"

I'VE talked a good deal about *Adventure's* being *your* magazine. Probably some of you have smiled wisely and remarked, "Hot air."

We keep a typewritten file of all criticisms and comments made by our readers, and this file is passed around to every one on the staff so that we can shape the magazine to your wishes.

Has any one of you ever written us a criticism of the magazine that wasn't acknowledged with thanks by me personally if there was a name and address signed to it? Probably there are a few such among you, but they are only accidental exceptions. Some thousands of you can testify to the rule.

There are also some of you who can testify to seeing your suggestions embodied in the magazine.

Thousands and thousands of you have made practical use of the various departments and services originated by the magazine for your benefit.

HAS any letter of yours to us ever failed to get a reply? Some of our replies are form letters, because we can't write 8,000 personal letters a year in addition to our routine duties, but the majority of you know from experience that whenever we can get into personal, human touch with our readers we do it. (Sure, that's "good policy," but also we do it because we're built that way and like to, and because we want you to understand that you mean more to us than merely some one who pays so much per copy or per year for the magazine.)

Our one big aim is to make *Adventure* the kind of magazine you want. To make it anything else would be foolish. Also, it's lots more fun when you realize your part in determining the magazine's policy and turn to and help shape it.

IF ANY of you are still thinking this is only "hot air," I think the following will convince you we are sincere:

On the next page we give you a blank ballot with which to cast your vote on every important point we can think of concerning the policy of the magazine. You can fill it out in a jiffy. All but 3 of the 17 points can be answered by a single stroke of the pencil. Indicate your votes, tear out the page, and mail it to us. Get your friends to do the same. We will make a careful tally of all votes on each separate point, announce the results in the magazine, and then plan future numbers of *Adventure* accordingly.

Now's your chance. Cast your vote. It will also be a favor and a help to us and we hope you'll do it on our account as well as your own. We want to suit you as much as you want us to.—A. S. H.

Digitized by Google

1. I do / do not want serial stories
2. I do / do not want a long, book-length novel in each issue
3. I do / do not want more of the shorter complete novelettes
4. I want more / fewer short stories
5. I do / do not want series of short stories
6. An x after it shows which of the series of short stories now running I like
   1. Dick Anthony 2. Come-On Charley 3. Miss Dem 4. Ivanoff
7. My favorite authors are:

8. What I like *most* about *Adventure* is:

9. What I like *least* about *Adventure* is:

10. I run a line through those of the following stories that I do *not* like: 1 Baseball, 2 Prize-ring, 3 Horse-racing, 4 Other sports, 5 Business, 6 The Movies, 7 Detective, 8 Mystery, 9 The future, 10 The past, 11 Humor, 12 Pathos, 13 Love, 14 Science, 15 Autos, 16 Aeroplanes, 17 The Sea, 18 War, 19 Exploration, 20 Buried treasure, 21 Imaginative and imp obable, 22 The West, 23 Alaska, 24 Canada, 25 Philippines, 26 South America, 27 Africa, 28 Asia, 29 Europe, 30 Australia, 31 England, 32 The U. S.
11. In general I do / do not prefer straight adventure stories to those of business, baseball, etc.
12. I want more / less Camp-Fire
13. I run a line through those departments I do *not* want continued:
    1. Lost Trails 2. Wanted 3. Trail Ahead 4. Information Directory
14. I want more / fewer Camp-Fire letters from adventurers and readers in general
15. I do / do not want a paragraph at the head of each story telling in advance what it is about
16. I want more / fewer poems
17. I want more / fewer fact articles (as opposed to fiction stories)

Use this space for *any* other preferences or suggestions of yours—as to kinds and length of stories; authors liked or disliked; suggestions for new series, serials or novelettes; Camp-Fire; make-up; contents-page; anything you please. Or use a separate sheet.

Signature _____

Address _____

Digitized by Google

WANTED MEN

NOTE.—We offer this corner of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to our readers. Naturally we can not vouch for any of the letters, the writers thereof, or any of the claims set forth therein, beyond the fact that we receive and publish these letters in good faith. We reserve the privilege of not publishing any letters or parts of a letter. Any inquiry for men sent to this magazine will be considered as intended for publication, at our discretion, in this department, with all names and addresses given therein printed in full, unless such inquiry contains contrary instructions. In the latter case we reserve the right to substitute for real names any numbers or other names. We are ready to forward mail through this office, but assume no responsibility therefor. **N.B.—Items asking for money rather than men will not be published.**

WOULD like to meet three or four fellows between 20 and 35 who are full of life and would like to see a good lively, exciting time, and the same time take the chance of making a heap of money. I am going to Sonora, Mexico, prospecting for gold. There is plenty of gold in the streams and creeks, if any man is game enough to go and get it. I am going Sluice Box mining, that is what they call poor man's mining. You will have the Yaqui Indian and Mexican to contend with, and they both are sneaking thieves whom you have to keep your eye on every minute.—Address TEDDY HARVEY, Phoenix, Ariz.

THREE young men who can ride, walk and can take care of themselves. Planning trip to South America overland. State age, height, experience if any, reasons for wishing to take trip, etc. Can promise large financial return for time invested. Discretion is best qualification.—Address W 254.

PARTNER with nerve and stickability to hunt and dig buried gold. Treasure is in brick and bar form, worth $300,000. I know particulars well enough to go within 100 ft. of treasure. We will need $200.00 to cover expenses and rent gasoline boat large enough to carry a ton besides crew. Gold is within 100 miles of Beaumont, Texas. Buried during U. S.-Mexican War. — Address L. L. LIVINGSTON, Gen. Del., Galveston, Texas.

ONE or two good honest fellows to go down into Arizona, New Mexico, and old Mexico to look for gold, silver and land. Have been all over the land and it looked good to me. Made trip last Winter on horseback from Louisville, Ky., to Santa Fé, N. M., in one month, spending $10.00. Am a native of Montana, 20 years old, 6 feet tall and weigh 175 lbs. Know all about camping, cooking, firearms, and am all-around cow-puncher. Partner will need horse and a little money to cover his share of the expense. I'll lay odds, he will get three times as much back as he puts up.—Address HERBERT B. SIPES, Buechel, R. F. D. No. 11, Ky.

MAN for trip into Amazon country. Prefer able-bodied man 22 to 30 years of age who can ride, shoot, canoe; in fact a good all-around husky rounder. Must be strictly sober, honest and trustworthy. One who can also handle telegraph and wireless instruments. LRM—the man who has two eagles, moon and anchor tattooed on right arm, a BOER emblem, skull and crossbones and snake on left—I prefer you. This may be profitable, or may not, but plenty of adventure promised.—Address J. B. HANLEY, L. B. 241, Sioux City, Ia.

WISH to get in touch with some one who wants a pal to go somewhere with. I am an American, 28 years of age, and can ride very well; also handle revolver or rifle some. Any place or anywhere that there is a chance of having some kind of adventure or making any money, I am willing to go.

I can also lay claim to the art, if I may call it an art, of keeping my mouth closed when it is needed.—Address CAPT. WM MCDOWELL, 67 St. John St., Coventry, England.

Inquiries for opportunities instead of men are NOT printed in this department.

ONE or two partners, or small party, to hunt and prospect in fine healthy climate in West Texas Mountains and Plains. Minerals, gold, silver and quicksilver. Game, wolf, coyote, bear, deer, wild-hog, raccoon, etc.—Address GEORGE F. CONKLIN, Bellaire, Harris Co., Texas.

PARTNER with a reasonable capital to cover his share in the expense of a trip to the Philippines to relocate and develop a gold mine that I found there in the U. S. Service. Prospect was shown me by a native whose wife and two daughters I saved from dishonor and death during the insurrection of one of the Southern Islands. He assured me he was the only living person who knew of this.

No curiosity-seekers or kids wanted. Send references.—Address No. W 255.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE.—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada.

TWENTY-FIVE dollars reward will be paid for information of whereabouts of Blayney Leslie if alive; or if dead, of the time, place and manner of his death. He left Chicago about 1894; was then 18 years of age. Was heard of shortly after from Ash Fork, Arizona, working in bridge gang of Santa Fé Railroad. Since then all trace of him has been lost.—Address JOHN LESLIE, 4223 S. Halsted St., Chicago, Ill.

JOSEPH GILBERTSON. Left Edinburgh, Scotland, 26th March, 1883, for Australia. Last heard from him 30th Sept. 1890; was leaving Brisbane, Queensland, with four others for north on prospecting trip. Was in Broadwater, Richmond River, N. S. W., for seven or eight years, and in Coolgardie, Western Australia, for some time.—Address JAMES M. GILBERTSON (nephew), care of *Adventure.*

PERCY JOHN BEDELL, age 26 years; height 5 ft. 10½ in.; complexion fair. Good shot with rifle or revolver. Last heard from at Spokane, Wash., working as scaler. Any one knowing whereabouts please communicate with family.—Address MR. J. BEDELL, Hamilton P. O., Gen. Del., Hamilton, Ont., Canada.

ED. "KID" DOBBERT, last seen in San Pedro and Los Angeles, Spring of 1907 or 1908, after fighting Danny Webster at Naud Junction Pavilion.—Address No. L. T. 252.

HENRY GUHL, discharged Co. C, 10th U. S. Inf., Nov. 22, 1902.—Address M. A. ROSE, St. James Hotel, Douglas, Ariz.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

ALBERT POGODA, last seen in Zurich, Switzerland. —Address EMIL PFEIFFER, 30th Co., C. A. C., Ft. Worden, Wash.

DONALD C. FAIRFAX, last heard of in Rio de Janeiro.—Address No. L. T. 251.

RALPH CARRICO, please write your old pal of five or six years ago.—Address W. M. FOX, Murkego, Wis., R. F. D. No. 10.

BROTHER, last seen in 1909.—Address STEPHEN EPP, 101 Schermerhorn St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Digitized by Google

AUGUST or September of 1901, I sailed from Philadelphia on the SS. *Anglo-Chilean* for South Africa. At New Orleans we took on a veterinary surgeon hailing originally from Indianapolis. Later, I understand he was in Crowley, La. During voyage we grew chummy. When I left ship at Durban to join the Cape Mounted Rifles, I lost sight of my friend. Effort on my part to locate him has since failed.

Have forgotten the name. He was about 5 ft. 7, with black hair and dark eyes.—Address DAVID J. DAVIES, Sporting Editor Pittsburgh Dispatch, Pittsburgh, Pa.

CAROL D. RAY, last heard of on farm near Pawhuska, Oklahoma, Summer of 1913. Smooth, oval face; dark eyes; dark brown hair; about 5 ft. 7 in. tall; stocky build; age 19; near-sighted. May be in old Mexico. Communicate with sister.—Address MRS. C. W. SNAKENBERG, Bar 9 Ranch, Adrian, Texas.

JAMES COMFORT, last heard of in Lepanto, Ark. Any one knowing whereabouts will confer a great favor by furnishing me information. Very urgent. Canadian papers please copy.—Address QUINLAN COMFORT, Box 234, Lawrenceville, Ga.

GEORGE D. TIBBITSON, formerly Co. D, 13th Inf., last heard from at Honolulu en route to P. I. with 13th Inf. in 1906. Please communicate with old pal. Important.—Address G. R. (DICK) BELLINGER, 271 Broad St., Tonawanda, N. Y.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

CARL JEFFERSON, alias "Jeff." Last seen on Commercial St., San Francisco, in dazed condition. Will he or anybody knowing his whereabouts please inform his old pal.—Address JACK IRVING, Berkeley Y. M. C. A., Berkeley, Cal.

COL. ROBERT B. WILSON, my brother, or any one who knew him. Last heard of in 1881, New York City. Had office at 63 Broadway, N. Y. Lived at Prospect Hotel. Was in mining business.—Address MRS. KATE R. HOPKINS, Box 227, Tampa, Fla.

FRED NELSON. Your chum who crossed in the SS. *Ionian* with you, arriving at St. John, N. B., on March 17th, 1907, would like to hear from you.—Address FRED TONKIN, Boisé, Idaho.

GOFF, or Goef, last name unknown, write to "Chet," with whom he walked from Missoula to Butte. Was sometime navy man, stationed on the China station.—Address "CHET," care *Adventure Magazine*, New York City.

JOHN L. MCRELAND, last heard from, Gila Bend, Arizona, Oct. 1, 1912. Was employed in quartz mine. Please communicate with his brother. — Address A. J. MORELAND, New Wilmington, Pa.

URITA. Any one knowing or bearing this surname, write. Matter of greatest importance. Canadian papers please copy.—Address CHARLES U. CUMMINGS, 722 Stanford Ave., Los Angeles, Calif.

ALL members of Co. M—1—2, write.—Address S. M. O'SULLIVAN, 316 Taylor St., San Francisco, Cal. (National Hdqt.) Ex-Army and Navy Men of the World 7.50 B, Howard St., S. F.

CARL F. MORROW, if you will write I'll sell out and go where you wanted me to go. California. Am where you last wrote.—Address your mother.

ELMER H. HOLBROOK, late of Marine Corps, U. S. S. *Kansas*, 1908.—Address J. H. H., 2583a Mance St., Montreal, Canada.

MADERO'S Foreign Legion. Members during 1911. If you read this, please write a comrade at arms. Especially if you were a member of Capt. Harrington's Company in the battle of Casas Grandes.—Address CHAS. H. DARLINGTON, Santa Barbara, Cal.

FRED SANDBERG, known on the Great Lakes as "Hobart" years 1893-4-5. In Freetown, Sierra Leone, Africa, 1896. Left New York in bark *Agathe* 1898, with a Klondike party for Cook Inlet, placer mining on Birch Creek, Alaska, 1898-99. Supposed to have shipped in San Francisco on American ship *Servia* for New York, Fall of 1900. Write old chum "Scotty."—Address DAN MCLEOD, P. O., El Paso, Texas.

HENRY ROACH, brother. Last heard from in Lewisbury, Mass., in 1868. Originally lived in Boston.—Address JAMES ROACH, 423 Hickory, Texarkana, Ark.

JOHN LEAR. Age about 65. Last heard of near Everett, Washington. Sister is anxious to hear from or concerning him.—Address P. P. B., Box 148, Skagway, Alaska.

RALPH DUNN, please write Eastern Oregon friend of your piano days.—Address L. T. 253.

BOB HICKMAN, bunkie of mine, Cuba during 1906-7-8-9, B Company, Hospital Corps. Understand he was discharged at Plattsburg, N. Y., Summer of 1909.—Address BOLTON ST. CLAIR, care Gen. Del., Seattle, Wash.

JAMES C. TAYLOR and wife, Margaret Dillon Taylor, who with two children, George and May Bell, left Roxbury, Mass., for California about 1867, accompanied by mother, Jane Taylor of Waltham, Mass.—Address JOHN A. TAYLOR, Mt. Park Hotel, Hot Springs, N. C.

S. G. HOFFMAN, cook, last heard from was in Holdenville, Okla., and Claude Simmons, R. R. fireman and electrician, last heard of was firing on M. O. & G. R. R., Southern Division.—Address F. M. BENSON, U. S. S. *Buffalo*, care P. M., San Francisco, Cal.

CHARLES B. RICE, uncle from Elido, Ohio. Last heard of in K. Cy. Believed to reside in Hannibal Co., Missouri.—Address MABEL C. RICE, 53 W. 35th St., New York City.

LEONARD BOLTON, son, age 24. Last heard from at Tacoma, Wash. Said he was going to Portland, Ore. No news for three years. Was with a man called "Curley." Any news thankfully received by mother.—Address MRS. HAMMOND, Nelson, B. C.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

PAUL C. HAMMOND, 5 ft. 11 in. high, slender; weighs about 140 lbs.; chestnut hair; blue eyes and a fair complexion; thumb on right hand rigid from blood-poisoning; perpendicular scar on right cheek; horizontal scar on left cheek.

Last heard from, Nov. 21, 1913, in Cheyenne, Wyoming, en route to Denver and Florence, Colo.—Address MRS. T. C. HAMMOND, Huron, Ohio.

HUBERT E. SIPES, last heard of in Rome, Italy, headed for Mexico. 6 ft. tall; weighs about 140 lbs.; age 18 years; black hair; gray eyes.—Address BLANT SIPES, R. F. D. No. 11, Buechel, Ky.

WILLIAM MCARTHUR, my brother. Piper in 42nd Black Watch Highlanders. Last heard of was working in Longlants Deep Mining Company, Johannesburg, South Africa, in 1897.—Address JOHN MCARTHUR, 504 Chapala St., Santa Barbara, Cal.

CHRISTIAN M. BUTTERBAUGH (Chris), uncle. 39 years old; blue eyes; black hair; about 6 ft. tall, and heavy set. Last heard of in Fairbury, Nebr.—Address MAUDE WESTLAKE, R. No. 3, Box No. 6, Boisé, Idaho.

ALONZO BRADLEY, father. Disappeared from Wellsville, Mo., twenty-five years ago. He was about 5 ft. 10 in.; dark hair.—Address MRS. MABEL FISHER, Collierville, Tenn.

J. C. PENNEY, son. 19 years old. Left Vallejo, Cal., on March 3, 1914.—Address M. E. PENNEY, 1150 S. Western Ave., Chicago, Ill.

ARTHUR W. DIES, husband. Age 51; 5 ft. 9 in.; light complexion. Last heard of, Des Moines, Ia., June, 1911. —Address A. W. DIES, Spring Valley, Minn.

JOHN MATTHEW DRENNAN, brother. Last heard from in Mexia, Texas, firing on construction train.—Address MARCELLA BENWARE, 1115 Josephine St., Ft. Worth, Texas.

CARL COINER, last heard from in Los Angeles and Pasadena.—Address WILLIAM SAUNDERS, 5562 Clemens Ave., St. Louis, Mo.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

Digitized by Google

THE following have been inquired for in "Lost Trails" during the last six months. They can get name of inquirer from this magazine:

A to C—ADAMS, EDDIE, sign-writer; Alston, William E.; Alt, W. D. (Billy); Ansell, Capt. R. H. M.; Arhens, Helen Breckenridge; Arrington, Tommy; Atherton, Jack; Baker, Mrs. Maude, left Dallas 1900; Atkin, Randolph; Barnes, William Henry; Barrette, Miss Cora Mabel; Bens, Joseph, called "Jupp"; Bishop, Charles C.; Black, Beb, alias "Big Ben," cattleman; Blackham, N. A.; Blankman, Charles H., worked in D. L. W. machine-shops, Buffalo, N. Y.; Boatswain's Mate *Holyoke*, Seymour Relief Expedition; Bossard, Raymond C.; Brice, M. E.; Brooks, Al. H., rancher, Canada; Brown, James; Burhans, Burton L.; Burns, William, tailor of Dubuque; Burns, William, in Eldorado in 1904-'06; Byers, R. C.; Carr, David H.; Case, John; Charlton, Arthur; Christensen, A. G., South America; Coates, John F., inventor of smoke-consumer; Cockrill, Arthur R.; Cole, Egbert L.; Comstock, Orns H.; Connelly, Jim, Co. I, 9th U. S. I.; Cooper, J. Howard; Cory, Willis (Red, Kentuck, or Wins Golden), Philippines, Tex., Cal.; Cotler, William T., Lake Fisher 1890; Crane, Roland, Henry; Crawford, John and Lee; Culp, Simon P.; Cunningham, Patrick, Michael and James; Cuyler, Alston O.

D to K—DALTON, JACK J.; Dalziel, James, bark *Socotra;* Davenport, Phil., Davidman, Max; Davis, Warren; Davies, "Cu "; Davis, E. L., formerly of Winnipeg; Day, Stanley; Dean George, whaling bark *Canton;* Deckard, Ed (Wesse); Denny Brothers; Duncan, George R.; Dwight, L. H., Hospital Corps, Philippines, 1900; Ellis, Harry; Elmsie, Donald E.; Ensign, W. H.; Engesser, Conrad A.; Ewell, Leighton; Fedoroski, Karol; Foy, George Havelock Willing, Francis, Henry Trenton, Samoa; Fullmer, Frank F.; Gallup, Cordia, known as "Leon Burt"; Gebbs, or Gibbs, rebel junta courier, Santa Rosalia, Gillespie, Boe W.; Gillespie, Gene, "Manhattan"; Goodwin, James Alexander, 36th U. S. V.; Gulliver, Iquique, '98; Hall, Charles T.; Hamilton, Charles; Hardy, John; Harson, Wm.; Hart, Jack, once of 5th U. S. Cavalry; Haskinson, Gordon (English); Hayes, "Bob"; Hellmann, H. H.; Heron, George A. of U. S. S. *Vermont;* Hess, Erskine ("Erk"); Hiatt, Claud, brother of; Hinckley, Roy and Harry; Hoffman, Clint, stowaway, *Closeburn:* Holbrook, Dis (civil engineer); Holden, Willis A.; Hollis, Bach, Huffman, J. L.; Irvin, Howard, on *Maitai*, '11; Jasper, Key West, Mexico; Jay, Wilburn, Madero Foreign Legion; Jessup, Theodore V.; Jordan, Fred and wife; Kanthar, Paul M. T. and Sorentzen Paul, alias "Sam Wilson"; Kemp, driver in Oakland; Kilburn, A. A.; Knight, Charles, Spokane, Wash.; Knudsen, Fred, *Red Rock, Balmoral.*

L to N—LAVELL, PROF. CECIL F.; Lake, Bruce; Landrum J. W. Kentuckian; Lane, Martin, U. S. A., Klondike; Lassen, Capt. Lorenz; Law, Gordon; Lawler, Slim; Lee, John R.; Leigh, T. G.; Levy, Samuel; Le Vonde, William Lighthowler, George W., formerly lance corporal, 6th Inniskillings Dragoons; Litchfield, H.; Lovett, Charles, seaman; Lyons, William C.; McCarthy Dan, rigger on Victoria Falls Bridge, Nyanza; McClintock, Harry K.; McDaniels, Taylor, druggist, fought Idaho forest-fires, 1910; MacDonald, John Ava; Macdonald, R., British Hussars, U. S. Cav.; McElvain William McGonigal, Ed., U. S. S. *Lancaster;* McIntyre, J. J. of Brandon, Man.; Mackie, Ed.; McKinzie, J. W., formerly U. S. N.; McLay, Charles; MacNeill, Jack V. ("Robbie"), artist; Maddux, John F.; Martel, Dick, Hemosillo Megie, Benjamin F., South America or South Africa; Meisel, John; Meissner, Pete, Grajervo; Meldrum, Archie Coatsworth; Mentusha, Big; Merle, Eugene; Meyrick, Lieut. Archibald, Prince of Wales Light Horse, Boer War; Miller, Frank; Miller, William, electrician; Morine, Capt. C. D.; Moleres, Edward; Moriarty, John F., Madero Foreign Legion; Morris, "Lee" or P. M.; Morris, Thomas George Dixon; Moulder, Joe; Murray, Michael, late of Tralee, Ireland; Niell, H. (Nielson); Nolan, Michael, born in Kilkenny; Nugent, Richard Thomas.

O to R—O'CALLAGHAN, Dennis Charles; O'Meara, William, bark *Guiana*, '86; O'Neil, Captain Billy; Olsen, Abbet and Beaver, Fred; Orpen, William M.; Owen, Robert; Owen, Allan H.; Paige, Frederick; Parker, Capt. F. T.; Parker, Jess, cowpuncher; Pavilla, Jack, of "Jackly Wonders"; Pennock, Dr. Walker C.; Phillpot, Shirley M., ex-sergeant, U. S.; Powers, Edw.; Raansvaal, Isaac, Co. I, 9th U. S. I.; Rae, Clarence, P. J. R.; Raeder, Edward J.; Ray, Paul; Reitmeier, Charley; Rice, Andrew, 49'er; Richardson, Frank Eply; Rickard, Mrs. Lauretta; Rivers, Major Don. C. A.; Robertson, Charlie, mulatto, birth-mark on one cheek; Robertson, Harry G., Customs, Manila; Rogers, Peter, of Manchester; Rogerson, William L.; Rompell, Charles; Russell, Charles B., Hospital Corps.

S to Z—SABIN, CARL AND STEELE, Clayton, late of the United States Navy; Sands, Gen. Cliff; Sarries, James H.; Schaeffer, Charlie, Sonora; Scheidell, John; Scott, Fred, once Pennsylvania newspaper man; Seaman, Charles Lovett; Seigel, "Dutch"; Servin, Martin; Shannon, James and Wm.; Shaw, William C.; Shepherd, Richard L., Vancouver and Toronto; Sherwood, F. A.; Smith, F. E., *Olympia* at Manila; Smith, Francis Basil, No. 17 Troop, South African Constabulary; Smith, Oscar, Australian; Smith, William Chalmers, Mexico; Snowberger, Kirk R.; Stearns, Herman; Stephenson, Robert Verne, Texan; Stephenson, George H.; Stout, E.; Stewart, E. B.; Sutherland, Charlie, once Bechuanaland Police; Sweidert, "Dutchy" (phonetic spelling); Thomson, Corp. John, 2nd Canadian Mounted Rifles, Boer War; Thomson, Roscoe; Thurber, E. T. (Tom); Tice, Wm. G.; Timmanus, Frank E.; Travis, Joe; Treat, Roy M.; Troughton, J. J.; Van Auker, Caesar; Van Wagoner, "Dutch"; Walker, Edith Sarah Juliette; Wiley, Miles G.; Williams, Elizabeth Matilda; Wilson, Charles Livingston; Willbern, Walter P.; Williams, Babe; Willis, A. Holden; Wooler, Dick, West Indies, 1906; Young, James B.

MISCELLANEOUS—Any one who worked J. F. Marshell's and John Bruggar's paper-box shops; Comrades, Co. G, 5th Inf. in Central and Western States; Rampby, Will F., F. Balance or Harry Balance; Members of K Co. of the 18th Inf. during 1900 to 1902; "Spade Tail" Joe Bennett, George Ligars, "Chicken" Gardner or any of the bunch of the 18th U. S. Inf. on Panay Island in '99-1900. Also Sergt. Behi, 18th Inf.; Will, mail at Sydney; Clare, William Steurtzel, Count Leach, "Doc"; any one 4th Texas Vol. Infantry in Spanish War; Boer comrades of John Bussanich at Ladysmith and along Tugela, also Murray, John, Morrows, Tom McTig'i, James, Ryan, Jack; Bonavita, friends of Capt. Jack; boy in Army, Navy or Marine Corps in the China Relief Expedition of 1900 and 1901; Brook, heirs of Glen; comrades on *Culzean*, 1875-9, or gunboat *Bulldog*, also Troop K 6th U. S. Cav., Apache campaigns, 1881-6; Comrades in Co. E, 20th U. S. Infantry, Troop E, 7th U. S. Cavalry; Comrades, Co. G, 41st Inf. and Capt. Graves' Company, 20th Inf.; Du Bois, Percy M., Plum, R. R., Enscoe, Joe, Carruthers, Chas., Selig, Lester, Hogan, Thos. L., Osbourne, Andy—once of *Evening Star;* Gibney, Jimmie; Gollrick, Charles, once U. S. N. H. C., Hospital Corps, 23rd U. S. Infantry, 40th U. S. V.; J. L. F.; Men with U. S. forces during the China Relief Expedition of 1900; Nelda, Miss Winniefred, Wilson, Francis, and their father of the Mexican Central R. R. Company; Nesbitt, Capt., V. C., and other comrades of M. M. Marsden, O'Connor, A. S., Ross, Bob, Van Damme, Jimmie, Kufeke, Hans, Griffiths, Jack, Harries, Julian, Gardiner, Jack—once E and C Troops, B. S. A. P.; Old shipmates British bark *Lyderhorn;* Sands, Gen. Cliff, and members of his proposed expedition; Tressider, Percy, comrades of; "Lintic" O'Sea, "El Rayo," comrades of; Van Leue, comrades of Capt. F. E.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

NUMBERS 56, 68, 73, 76, W 93, W 107, W 140, W 150, W 153, W 183, W 184, W 189, W 195, W 203, W 211, W 212, W 215, W 218, C 189, C 198, C 205, L. T. 207. Please send us your present addresses. Letters forwarded to you at addresses given us do not reach you.—Address A. S. HOFFMAN, care *Adventure.*

MANUSCRIPTS sent us by the following are being held by us, having been returned to us as unclaimed at the addresses furnished:

W. Lynch, Trenton, N. J.; W. Mack, Pacheca, Mexico; Henry W. Edwards, New York; W. G. Gormley, Ontario, Canada; George Stillons, Chicago, Ill.; Francis Manston, Chicago, Cal.; Charles E. Mack, New York; William Barry Kane, Chocolate Bayou, Texas; James Perry, Brooklyn, N. Y.

RANDOLPH H. ATKIN, please send us your present address. Mail sent to you at addresses given us doesn't reach you.—Address A. S. HOFFMAN, care *Adventure.*

IMPORTANT NOTICE

AS ANNOUNCED in the July issue, every item will be published three times, then taken out. But in the *January* and *July* numbers of each year we will publish the names of all who have been inquired for and remain unfound.

Digitized by Google

What does the New Year mean to YOU?

Is it to be the same old grind of hard work, uncongenial employment and small pay?

Is it to be another twelve months of standing still while you watch other men get the advancement **you** hoped to get?

Or, will you make it a year of real **achievement?** Will you realize **now** that the better job goes only to the man who has the **training,** and will you take steps **now** to get the training that the better job requires?

If you really WANT the coming year to count for something, let the International Correspondence Schools help you to make your progress SURE and TANGIBLE.

It is the business of the I. C. S. to raise salaries. For 24 years the I. C. S. have been training men for success in the kind of work they like best. During this period, many thousands of earnest, ambitious men of all ages and occupations have obtained better-paying positions in more congenial surroundings through a course of I. C. S. instruction.

Let the I. C. S. help **you,** too. Join the army of well-paid men.

Mark the Coupon

The coming year is the most important in your life. Get a real start **now.** The first essential to success is initiative. Mark and mail the coupon **today.**

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
Box 884 SCRANTON, PA.
Explain, without further obligation on my part, how I can qualify for the position before which I mark X

Salesmanship	Civil Service
Electrical Engineer	Railway Mail Clerk
Elec. Lighting Supt.	Bookkeeping
Electric Car Running	Stenography & Typewriting
Electric Wireman	Window Trimming
Telephone Expert	Show Card Writing
Architect	Lettering & Sign Painting
Building Contractor	Advertising
Architectural Draftsman	Commercial Illustrating
Structural Engineer	Industrial Designing
Concrete Construction	Commercial Law
Mechan. Engineer	Automobile Running
Mechanical Draftsman	Teacher
Refrigeration Engineer	English Branches
Civil Engineer	Good English for Every One
Surveyor	Agriculture
Mine Superintendent	Poultry Farming
Metal Mining	Plumbing & Steam Fitting
Railway Accounting	Sheet Metal Worker
Stationary Engineer	Navigation / Spanish
Textile Manufacturing	Languages / French
Gas Engines	Chemist / German

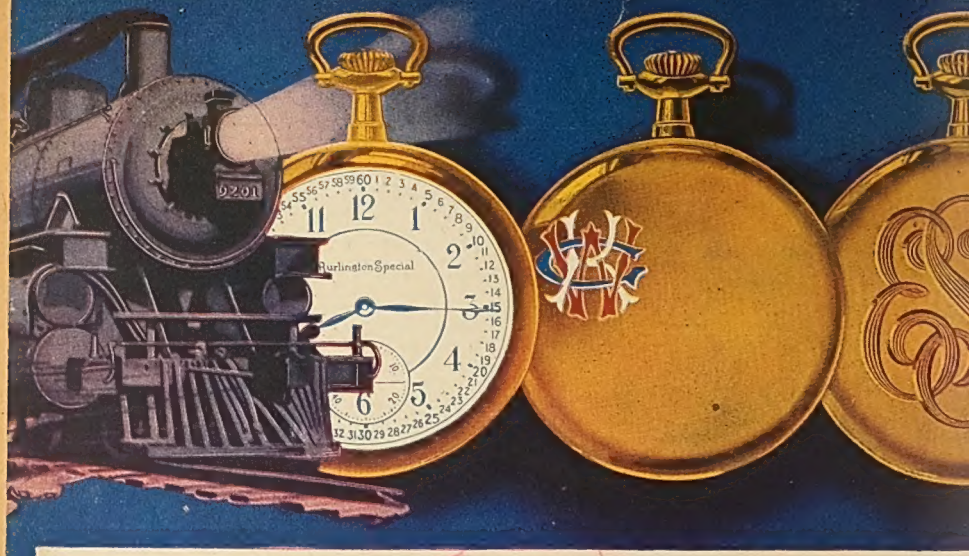
Name_____

Present Occupation_____

Street and No. _____

City_____ State_____

Digitized by Google



19 Jewel Burlington $2.5

The Master Timepiece Now Sold Direct for Only A

Write today for our great offer on the master timepiece—*adjusted* to the *adjusted* to positions—*adjusted* to to isochronism—now sent *direct to you without a pe* you decide to keep it, pay only the rock-bottom direct price (the same price that even jeweler must pay) either for cash or at the rate of $2.50 a month. Send coupon today.

Write for Special Off

Send us the coupon below—or a postcard for the great, sweeping *direct* offer on the genuine Burlington. *We want you to see and examine the Burlington.* Find out for yourself what a magnificent timepiece it is—and at a price which must surprise you. Write today for the book that shows you handsome illustrations in full color of the newest watch cases that you have to choose from. The latest triumphs of master goldsmiths are yours on this special offer.

New Idea Wat
Block and R grams, Diamon French Art,

Send the Coupon for New Watch

Learn the inside facts about watch prices, and the many superior points of the Burlington priced products. Just put your name and address on the coupon, letter or postcard and get the Wa

Burlington Watch Co. 19th Street and Marshall Boulevard—Dept. 1451 **Chica**

ngton
h Co.
and Marshall Blvd.
451 Chicago, Ill.
send me (without obligation
paid) your free book on watches
xplanation of your cash or $2.50 a
offer on the Burlington Watch.

Digitized by Google